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BY

SWAMI TATTWANANDA

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Publisher's Note

It is indeed a great pleasure to be able to present before the English knowing readers one more book entitled 'The saints of India' by Swami Tattwananda. It contains a critical study of the lives of forty saints and provides the interested readers with necessary information on religion, society, customs and manners of different people and also the guidance chalked out by the spiritual giants for the uplift of aspirants. This valuable book will have a great appeal to the readers who may get therein some food for thought and may wish to satisfy their spiritual quest by pouring over the glorious lives of saints serving as tonic for vitalising the heart of society.

Sri V. A. Thiagarajan, M. A. retired professor of English, Mysore University has kindly taken great pains to go through the manuscripts and I express my gratitude to him.

Our labour will be justified if the book serves the purpose of fulfilling the needs of the readers throughout the English knowing world.

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Introduction

Savants hold that the spiritual soil of India is like a delta made up of layer upon layer of its religious endeavoners from time immemorial. They base their theory on the historical materials which demonstrate how varieties of religious striving have contributed to its formation. It can not be denied that religious faiths of India worked on the principle of 'live and let live'. But occasionally this spirit of toleration was vitiated in the struggle for existence and new challenges came with the proselytization of India by coercion and sometimes by bloodshed. These challenges were met by the free spirits and lovers of humanity with their new techniques of spiritual regeneration and construction of the bridges of love to suit the needs of the hour. It was left to the saints to bring about, by their lives, a synthesis and keep India's spiritual heritage alive by maintaining the uninterrupted flow of the stream of spiritual conscionsness throughout the vast country for the welfare of humanity at large.

Religion, the mother of civilization is a mighty force for universal good. The secret urge of evolution and the spiritual disquiet at the existing order of things lead men to make conscious effort to understand this and the nature of their being without which they can never exist. So struggle is a common phenomenon in all. There are people and their number is very great, who are bereft of inner spirit. That is why they miss the central truth about life and its spiritual aim and in confusion laugh away the potential divinity as absurd idea. But there are others who, though their number is very small, use superior gift of their intellect to understand the condition of life and meaning of struggle. They want to lead enlightened life endowed with far-sight, fore-sight and insight and try to solve the intricate problems of life that agitate men from the dawn of civilization. They struggle to uncover divinity lying concealed within them. Those who succeed in it become the blessed citizens of the city of God. The world has seen many seers of God at different lands and at different ages. When the ascent of men towards divinity is seriously endangered the seers appear to release the clogged wheels of spiritual progress of mankind. They attain perfection through self control and removal of ignorance, the cause of bondage. They are divine, full of love, joy and wisdom, above nature and absolutely free. Nothing can bind them. They are free from want, misery and fear. They have no cause for strife or grief. They are the salt of the earth. Out of fulness of heart they preach what they see and feel. Their selfless love flows alike to all. Living under the most difficult circumstances their life is self-emolating austerity, their contact brings strength, purity and solace to all, their loving heart is the refuge of their followers. Through their life men see vividly the ideal to be realised. Their teachings dispel doubts, their life furnishes humanity with a living model, gives impetus to the ascent of men towards godhood and a fresh lease to religion. They help humanity to lead the life of purity, proceed towards the spiritual goal of divinity and attain, godliness. They make difficult maxims simple for easy comprehension by average people and are reflected in the heart of their followers. To speak in the words of Isherwood they are "like motionless reservoir supplying electricity to a country side. They are calm, impersonal, holding back nothing for themselves, existing only to transmit the tremendous spiritual force which rushes through them and gives light to the surrounding world."

This book contains a critical study of the lives of forty saints including in its list the saints of different sects in India. It supplies material for an aspirant to become optimist about the life eternal by following the path chalked out by the seers. Thorough study of their lives is beneficial for the individual and the people at large.

TIRTHANKAR MAHABIR

The wise sincerely believe that time is an ally of truth and they also believe that only that which has been verified by time is true. It is an undeniable fact that when a lover of truth and an ardent lover of freedom is the victim of adverse circumstances and is tortured and imprisoned, the truth for which he fights, speaks out even more eloquently and the greatness of the hero is proclaimed even more loudly. The condition of India some 2500 years ago proclaims eloquently the truth of this statement.

Society was at the time subject to that kind of formalism which kills the spirit. The ideal of religion was lost sight of in the pomp and peagantry of ritualism. The same decadence was manifest in the social and economical aspects of society. That sense of discontent was the harbinger of a better order of life. Thus it happened that a great soul Mahabir Tirthankar was born at Kundagram near Vaisali on the 13th night of the bright moon in the month of Chaitra in 599 B. C. of a respectable Kshatriya land lord named Siddharta. His wife Trisula had a dream some time before the birth of her child. She saw in her dream successively for three days a white elephant, a shining bull and a white lion each in turn jumping from heaven and falling on her lap. The dream portended that the birth of the child would give joy to his parents and to the whole of the Kshatriya race ; that it would herald the coming of a bright period for the people and that it would usher in an era of wealth and prosperity. The child that was born under such aupicious signs was named Vardaman. Trisula, the mother of the child was the sister of the king of Vaisali and he was in turn related to the rulers of Maghada, Anga, Kosambi and Avanti and was ranked high among the Kshatriyas of the time.

Vardaman Mahabir was born of a pious family. His parents were devoted to Parswanath, one of the early founders or Tirthankars of Jainism. Several remarkable feats of courage and of kindness are related of the early life of Vardaman. It is said that when he was playing with his friends near a garden a very poisonous snake appeared there. The boy caught hold of it, twirled it round and round and then threw it away, so that it might make good its escape. The next moment he collected together his friends who had run away and was lost in play, as if nothing had happened. As he was remarkably intellegent, it is said that his loving parents provided him with the best of education in those times.

In the course of time Vardaman married Jasoda who was at once lovely and accomplished ; she was the daughter of a neighbouring Kshatriya ruler of Vaisali named Samarabir and as the years passed they were blessed with a beautiful daughter named Anavadya. The Jaina books refer to her as Priyadarsana. Although he was born in the midst of plenty and was brought up with the affection and care of his parents he did not find any peace of mind for wealth can give only physical comfort and other amenities of life but it can not ead one to life's supreme goal. Vardaman was born with a mission in life and that mission knew no limitatons. It was now time for the Samskaras to ripen. After the death of his parents he decided to leave home but at the request of his brother he stayed at home for two more years ; and he availed himself of this interval to prepare himself to reach the final goal.

On an auspicious day in the month of Agrahayan Vardaman took the vow that he would lead the life of a monk. The formal ceremony of renunciation took place under an Asoka tree; thousands of spectators watched it. The young aspirant cut off with his own hands his beautiful locks of hair and then laid aside his rich robes and the insignia of the Kshatriya order. The tears of his beautiful wife and affectionate daughter could not bind him. From that time onward he was a monk who had to observe the virtues of non-injury, truth and continence. He was to tread the path of liberation from sorrows and happiness and remain equally indifferent to life and death. He now led the life of a wandering monk. Even the last piece of cloth he had he gave to a begger and he roamed about in the majesty of Nature like a lion in the forest. By the practice of austerity, renunciation and self-control he taught his creed of Ahimsa and his view of life left an indelible impression on succeeding ages.

When winter approaches the Sadhaka sits for meditation before a fire. It not only keeps him warm but also helps him to keep off the wild animals. But Vardaman used to sit in the open places careless of the sun or shower. He practised severe austerity in order to get rid of his body conciousness. Owing to constant fasting his body became emaciated and yet he continued his quest staying some time at lonely places such as forests or burning ghats. Thus in the course of his wanderings he came to Astigram and there he studied the philosophy of Parswanath. He used to lead a rigorous life never sleeping more than three hours a day. He devoted the rest of his time to meditation, self analysis and discrimination. Fasting formed a part of his Sadhana. Whenever he went out to collect food, if he saw some one in front of a house in quest of food he would leave that place and go away so that he might not deprive him of the expectant charity.

Vardaman who had now become a wandering monk spent one of the Chaturmayas near Nalanda. It was not only a centre of learning but also a place of religion, and there he met many earnest souls. Among them was Mangaliputra Goshal who was a young Sadhaka of Ajivika Sect. Mahabir was attracted by his spirit of renunciation and young Goshal became one of his disciples. After six years of close association owing to some difference of opinion they parted company.

Mahabir believed that though our present body and mind are the result of past endeavour and action, yet by proper endeavour and action in the present, it is possible to determine our future. What is required is complete self confidence and self control. But Goshal was of the view that fate rules over all and that Purushatantra can play but a minor part. Although Goshal considered himself as Tirthankar, in the end he fell from eminence and in his last days he recognized that Tirthankar was right and he begged pardon of him.

The constant struggle to conquering the senses in order to attain the stage of 'Jina' or 'Kevali' (a perfected being) brought to him at first untold hardship. Neither insult nor torture nor fear of death would daunt him. All that was part of his struggle against Mara or evil spirit.

Once when he was wandering along a forest which was the haunt of wild animals and of lawless men he was tortured by the savage people who went to the extent af mutilating him; but all that he stood in silence for he would not break the vow of silence which he had taken. On another occasion he was beaten mercilessly by the guards who took him to be a thief. The head of the department who was under the influence of drink ordered that he should be hanged. Seven times the noose was put round him and seven times it slipped until at last they realized that he must be a great soul and then they realeased him.

One day when Vardaman was resting under a tree during one of the Chaturmasyas at a village called Chhamani a certain cow-herd approached and thinking that he was sitting idly there asked him to take charge of his bull so that he might go to the village on some urgent business. When he returned he found that his bull was gone but that person was sitting there solid as a rock. The irate villager pierced his ears by thrusting wooden pegs into them till blood flowed freely. But he did not protest. With this sore Vardaman reached a village called Paba. Fortunately for him a physician, out of kindness pulled out the plugs and cured him by applying medicine though it was a prolonged treatment.

It was this power of enduring pain, insult and wrong, it was this power of austere Tapasya which made him persevere on the path which he had chosen and for which he had renounced his home and all. It was this power that finally brought him to the outskirt of a small village called Jambia where he spread his seat under a Sal tree ; and there he remained absorbed in meditaion for two days. It was here that he realized the ultimate knowledge. He had become a 'Kevali', a 'Jina' to whom all thoughts of the world finally disappeared. He had realized every thing, the mystery about God, human beings, animals and their thought currents. He had become an Arhat. He had found out the mystery of creation and of the universe. He had become a Tirthankar, a truth seer and a path finder.

Fully confident of his life's mission he now appeared before the public in his new role of a teacher of the path he had found out; and he called upon them to share with him the joy of the discovery. He discoursed to them on the realization of the Eternal and brought a new hope to mankind. He pointed out that if his instruction were sincerely followed it could help one and all to attain the ultimate goal of life; it mattered little whether one was a householder or a Sanyasin. When one sees the light i, e, realizes the truth all the bonds of Karma are broken; and all the sins commited in one's past life are broken by repentence, austerity, the practice of discipline and the control of the senses over both mind and body. By attaining such state of mind one becomes free both in mind and in body. In this way one becomes free from the entanglement of the fresh bonds of Karma and the mind then merges in peace and joy.

This method of attaining ultimate liberation appealed to both monks and householders. Once one of his disciples Indrabhuti Gautama complained that it wiped out all differences between monks and householders. But Mahabir said that his doctrine was devoid of all narrowness, that it was liberal and universal and that every one had a right to practise it. Indrabhuti was an elderly Brahmin, a great scholar and the acknowledged spokesman of the Brahmins of the east but he could not get over the limitations of the mind until Mahabir spoke on the soul, on Karma and the ideal of life. Although Indrabhuti at first felt ill will towards Mahabir on account of his anti-Vedic attitude he later on became reconciled to him and became one of his principal followers, he was followed by his brother Agnibhuti who, too, became his follower. In this way the cult of Mahabir spread far and wide.

After some time When Mahabir reached Rajgriha, Bimbisara, the king of Magadha honoured him by paying him a visit. The king, the courtiers and officials alike became his followers and in this way the cult of Mahabir spread over the neighbouring kingdoms of Videha, Champa, Sravasti, Kosambi and Kasi. It was while he was expounding his point of view at Kasi that his ambitious disciple Mangaliputra Goshal thought he could excel his master by practising black magic on him. But it recoiled like a boomerang and cursed by his guru he died within a week. With the death of Goshal his creed of fatalism was also buried. The concept of Purushakar (self endeavour) and the ethical means to it such as simplicity, the practice of truth, non-stealing and the non-acceptance of gifts—all these attained their due place of importance in the Jaina organisation. Some allege that the order of monks in India is founded in imitation of Buddhism and Jainism but this notion is without foundation. Before the rise of those two great souls monasticism found a very honourable position in Hinduism. The Sanatan Dharma prescribed the vow of practising non-injury, truth, non-stealing, continence etc at the time of initiation into the sacred monastic order (c/Sacred book of the east, vol. 14, p 275, Bodhayan 11,10,18). Buddhism and Jainism have their inspiration of monasticism from the Brahmanical cult and have adopted their principles only in a different way.

As has been pointed out by Jacobi that both Buddhism and Jainism should be considered as offshoots of Hinduism for it is there that they have their basis. The difference lies only in the way in which they developed their common heritage specially in their attitude to monasticism. As the years passed Jainism developed into two distinct schools of thought the

Digambar sect and the Swetambar sect. The difference lay in the interpretation of the sacred texts and as regards certain social customs and observances. The Digambar sect roam in the majesty of nature, shave their head. According to them possessing wealth is detrimental to liberation, male birth is indispensible for acquiring fitness for liberation. The Swetambar sect do not interpret the rules as rigidly as the Digambar sect. The rigid interpretation of the prohibition against the taking of lives has resulted in the Jains taking to trade as their profession for the art of ploughing which is necessary for agriculture might lead to the killing of some of the lower form of life.

Jaina philosophy is pluralistic and it leads to the positing of certain metaphysical categories such as Jiva, Ajiva, Banda, Punya, Papa and Moksa. In course of time Jainism developed its own rituals and forms of worship. The worship of the Tirthankars formed part of their creed for they hope to attain their goal by worshipping those who have led the way. Though devotion as a principle has no place in it it has been accepted. Some of them are Vaisnavas (c/ History of Indian Philosophy, part 1, Tarak nath Roy). Jainism was a portent factor in the development of literature in all its phases in the development of the fine arts specially in culture. More over it stimulated the development of literature in all its departments such as epics, novels and dramas. It also contributed greatly to the development of the sciences. According to Berth's Religion of India the Jains have shown greater efficiency in the development of literature and science than others. The main languages of both the north and the south have been greatly benefitted by their literature. Their contribution in arts is immense. Udaygiri, Khandagiri, Girnar, Mount Abu are specimens of their taste in the subject.

Though Mahabir has not left any written record of his teachings his followers who were interested in polemics developed Logic as an instrument of disputation. Thus by means of logic they maintained that when obstacles are removed the soul attains its natural perfection and attains infinite knowledge, infinite bliss and infinite power and this alone is liberty. According to Jaina ethics what is essential is to have sympathy for all beings. Jaina philosophy posits that every object has infinite aspects, no particular point of view contains the whole truth. Thus their philosophy is one of pluralism and consequently it is also one of atheism ; for they do not accept the existence of a Supreme Being or God. Such was the doctrine that was proclaimed by Mahabir. He taught it for a period of thirty years. His work having been accomplished he entered Mahasamadhi on an auspicious day. His followers felt that the light of knowledge has passed away from the world and in honour of it they light thousands of little lamps in honour of his memory on the Dipavali Amabasya.

GURU NANAK

There lived in the village of Talwandi near Bhetti, a Kshatriya Kalu vedi by name. That place is situated on the bank of the river Ran near Lahore. The term 'vedi' was the family title signifying that they were descended from the solar race of Sri Ramchandra. Kalu vedi married an accomplished and beautiful girl named Tripati and after many years of marriage they were blessed with a daughter. Some years after her birth a son was born to Kalu on the midnight of the full moon of the month of Kartic in the year 1469 A. D. The family priest who was invited for the Namakaran ceremony was very pleased with the beautiful form as well as the auspicious signs on the body of the child. When he came to know the time of birth of the child he calculated the conjunction of the planets and found them to be very auspicious. He prophesied that the boy would one day become the glory and ornament of the race ; and the child was given the name Nanak Nirankari.

From boyhood Nanak exhibited a remarkable trait—that of devotion to monks and Fakirs. Whenever he would meet any Sadhu he would go to him, find out his wants and render service to him. At the age of five he was sent to school. Even at that tender age he showed remarkable intellectual acumen. He was proficient in Sanskrit, Persian and Arithmetic. There is a story current that in his school day he told his teachers that they should not teach him trash but that they should teach him the glory of Ram and Gopal for that alone is enduring. These words of wisdom from a tender boy of five caused great surprise among his teachers.

On one occasion it is said that he saw some Brahmins offering oblations of water to the manes of their ancestors. The boy too in imitation poured some water on some dry land. When he was asked the meaning and purpose of it he explained that he was pouring water in order that it might fertilize his fields in his far off native village. When he was told how impossible it was he asked them that if water poured on earth could not reach another distant place on earth what was the guarantee that it would reach heaven. When the efficacy of the Mantras was explained to him he realized his mistake and he began in earnest the study of the sacred books so that he might know the underlying philosophy of rituals. Meanwhile Nanak was initiated and was invested with the sacred thread. Although he was averse to it in the beginning yet he agreed to conform with the tradition. His inquisitiveness prompted him to ask the officiating priest whether the recitation of sacred formulas would by themselves be sufficient to assure salvation if one should be addicted to evil ways. He also wished to know if the thread of contentment with truth as the knot would by itself be sufficient to get rid of great sins. It is needless to add that these words of wisdom from an youngster were not to the liking of the elders.

When his father noticed that his young son was not interested in the discharge of his worldly duties and was more inclined towards a monastic attitude to life he thought that he would divert son's mind by putting him incharge of some money so that he might become a businessman in the course of time. On his way Nanak saw some starving monks. He argued within himself that though business transactions might add to worldy profit, helping the Sadhus would be the means of attaining lasting benefit in heaven. He therefore spent the money upon the Sadhus and returned home empty handed. The chagrin of his father did not in any way alter his resolve, rather it helped to strengthen him in his resolve.

His father however did not give up his plans for his son. He put him to tend cattle. When the boy fell asleep and allowed the cattle to wander at will into the neighbouring field Nanak invited fresh trouble upon himself. The angry owner of the neighbouring field approached Nanak threating dire punishment. To his astonishment he saw Nanak deeply asleep and a very venomous cobra was protecting him as it were with its upraided hood.

Kalu, the father of Nanak was the Thasildar of the village. The neighbours advised him and said that the best way to bring round his son was to see him married. Kalu accepted the advice and selected a girl from the neighbouring Kastriya house of Moularyouna as the most suitable. Although Nanak married her in order to please his parents his mind and heart were not set on worldly success. Nanak had a favourite sister. Her husband Jayram was a high dignitary working under Daulat khan Lodi. She persuaded Nanak to accept some job in government office and Nanak worked for some time at Lahore. By this time he was blessed with two sons called Srichand and Laksmidas. For some time Nanak worked very efficiently, earned money by honest ways and spent it on the Sadhus. Whispering tongues spread evil tales against him and one day he found himself relieved of his office. Although he was honourably acquitted and by way of compensation was offered a higher post he would have none of it. He told his friends not to trouble him with their importunities for if he served God with the zeal with which he served the king he would not be discredited. The attraction for worldly things grows with what it feeds upon. The best course, he said, would be to root out all worldly desires. With ineffable modesty he said that his mind was not broad enough to deal with both God and the world at the same time.

Although the God intoxicated Nanak felt happy within himself his parents who were anxious for his secular well being, made him the manager of their ancestral landed property. But another call awaited him. He told his ever anxious parents that he would cultivate the fertile field of life with high and noble thoughts, water it with devotion and reap the fruit of divine love. He would level down the high places with humility and raise the low places by means of contentment. A cultivator of that kind, he said, would find a place in the abode of God.

Kalu did not understand the sigificance of what Nanak said. If he needs must be a businessman he would treasure the name of the Lord and keep his accounts clear by performing good deeds and abstaining from evil ways. In this way spoke the God intoxicated son and the worldly father thought that the son was beside himself and invited the physcians to cure his son. It was no ordinary disease to be cured with the medicine of worldliness.

Nanak studied the sacred books of the Hindus and the Muslims alike but he was not satisfied with the mere form of religion with which many people are satisfied. He wished to get at the spirit behind the form and in order to unravel the mystery of religion in all its forms he travelled as a recluse both within India and abroad.

It is said that quest brought him to Mecca, the holy place of the Muslims. One day when he, out of extreme fatigue, lay stretched with his feet towards the Kaaba he was accosted by a Fakir who called him an infidel for stretching his feet towards the holy place. Nanak with his usual serenity requested him to remove his feet in the direction in which God is not. The Fakir then realizod how foolishly he would have acted if he had belaboured such a holy man. Wherever Nanak went he noticed with regret the prevalence of show, rituals and forms which went counter to the spirit of religion. He wished to remove the ills of society by preaching fraternity, purity and self-control.

On his return home he took to preaching and he spoke out of the fulness of his heart. He visited many places and attracted many people. Special mention may be made of a few of them such as Balabhai, Bhagirath, Mansukh and Mardana, all of whom became his disciples. One of his devotees Kroriya by name built him a house ; although Nanak refused to accept the gift of a house he yet graced the place by staying there for some time with parents, wife and son and served them.

After some time the indifferent attitude of Nanak again became predominant. Nanak completely renounced all house hold connections and entered the holy order of Sanyas. We do not know when, where and by whom he was initiated into Sanyas. But there is recorded evidence to show that he practised Yoga, remained absorbed in deep meditation days and nights together sitting in the yogic pose without food and drink and sleep. We are told that on one occasion when he was taking bath in a river near Sultanpur he spent there days and nights together below water. People even now refer to the place where he practised Yoga as 'Robi saheb' and they call the tree under which he sat as 'Babakiber'.

After attaining Siddhi he went out for preaching and he was accompanied by Balalbai and Mardana ; his aim was to unite both the Hindus and the Mulims under one fold and he accepted adherents from the two folds. In the course of his preaching work he was arrested and taken prisoner at the command of Ibrahim Lodhi, the then Pathan ruler, his only fault being the preaching of a religion other than that of the Koran at Garchattra fair at Multan. Being in advantageous position the ruler considered all religions other than his own to be false but cruel time avenged this fanaticism. After great suffering for long seven months in the prison cell of the Pathan ruler he was set free as it were by the whirligig of history when Ibrahim Lodhi was defeated and killed at the battle of Panipat in 1526 by Babar, the Mogul king.

Some incidents in connection with his life are full of miracles. It is said that while travelling as a pilgrim at various places specially the holy places of India one day he was very much pressed by thirst and he asked one Budha to fetch some drinking water from the nearby tank to quench his thirst. When Budha reported painfully about his failure to procure the water from the tank as it was completely dried up Nanak requested him to try again. Budha went to the tank and was surprised to find drinking water in the tank full to the brim and he brought it to quench Nanak's thirst. This miracular power charmed Budha and he surrenderd to Nanak who accepted him as his disciple. This incident had a far reaching effect in his preaching work. Many villagers who suffered greatly from scarcity of water were astonished to find the dried up tank full of sweet drinking water. They became his adherents, some even became his disciples. The place where this incident took place is known as Amritsar, the holy place of the Sikh community.

Amritsar has a history of its own. It is not known what was its former name. From the above incident Amritsar (from the word Amritsayar i, e, tank full of nectar) the importance of the place increased. Ramdas, the fourth Sikh guru renovated it again in 1574 A. D., extended its area and built a temple within it. This is known as 'Gurudwar' also 'Darbarsaheb' by the Sikhs. Ahmad Shah of Afghanistan invaded the Punjab, defeated the Sikhs completely in 1762, demolished the temple, polluted the tank with the blood of cows slaughtered there. Ranjit Singh, the lion of the Punjab recovered the lost country, occupied the temple. He spent enormous money for its repair and remodelled it with white marble and gold dome. Thence it is known as golden temple. The big tank which is ever filled up with transparent water is connected with the canal to avoid stagnancy A bridge leads to the temple in the centre of the tank. The Granthasaheb written by Guru Nanak, Guru Govinda Singh and other gurus hold the place of honour in the shrine. They are wrapped in precious silk and are read and worshipped with great reverence by the Sikhs.

It is said that Nanak had the rare gift of knowing the past, present and the future and could easily read the mind of the people. On one occasion a scoundrel built a choultry for pilgrims, not from any philanthropic motive but to way lay them he entertained them in the day time but snatched away their belonings and some times killed them even at night fall. When Nanak came to know this he warned the mischief monger and advised him to desist from this. This warning had its effect ; the man repented for his misdeeds and was reformed.

Accompanied by his disciples such as Balabhai and Mardana, the famous musician and the player of musical instrument 'Rabab' Nanak came to visit the temple of Jagannath at Puri and was staying in a forest garden near the river Mahanadi. The devotional song composed by Nanak and sung by Mardana with his 'Rabab' created a spiritual atmoshphere and attracted a large number of people who flocked there to see him. This popularity of Nanak made Chaitanya Bharati, the head of some monastery at Puri, zealous of him and he engaged some

Bhairab (evil spirit) to kill his enemy, but the spirit is powerless in the presence of holy man, every time the said Bhairab endeavoured to finish his task he felt a burning sensation throughout his body. This did not escape the attention of Nanak and he sent Mardana to know the cause and bring him near. After this when Nanak instructed him to lead a pure life and give up evil intention he became a changed man and he left the stick which was meant for killing Nanak. Nanak planted it under the earth, it sprouted and it turned into a tree with branches and fresh leaves. This miracle which converted the wicked and made the dead twig sprout charmed all.

When Nanak and his disciples entered the temple compound of Jagannath they were refused to go inside by the priests on suspicion that they were Muslims who came to pollute the atmosphere and demolish the image. Driven thus mercilessly from the temple he came to Swaragadwar with his disciples and there he consoled them not to worry much for this for Prasadam (food offered to Lord Jagannath) would surely come to them. He then began to sing and pray to God who, it is said, appeared before him at night with Prasadam in a golden plate. The Lord showered grace on him and caused the Ganges flow like a fountain which consecrated the whole place and is known as Gupta Ganga (hidden Ganges). Later on when Raja Maha Singh, the father of Ranjit Singh came to visit the temple of Jagannath, he remodelled it with enclosure and door in memory of this miracle by Nanak.

On a different occasion Nawab Daulat Khan persuaded Nanak to go to the mosque and say his prayer there. Simple as he was he followed the Nawab inside the compound of the mosque but stood aside without saying his prayer. Asked by the Nawab as to the cause why he kept himself aloof from the rest who were praying Nanak replied, 'I watch how you pray; I find that while praying you were thinking of the beautiful face of your Begam and the Kaji who conducted the prayer was only thinking of the disease of his daughter. While praying one should be sincere to God and should not think of any thing except God. This miraculous power and straightforwardness of Nanak charmed all.

As days passed Nanak felt that he should retire from the world but he should install some body in his place to fulfill the unfinished task started by him. His foresight and power of selection were wonderful. In order to select the most competent person from among the disciples, who could continue his mission in his absence he devised a means. On a certain occasion while roaming about on the bank of a river with his disciples he pointed out to them a dead body being carried away by the current. He asked who among them could eat the dead body. Immediately Lehana, one of the disciples jumped into the river without caring for the safety of his life amidst violent current. Coming near the corpse he sought the permission of his guru as to which portion of the dead body he should begin to eat. Lehana brought it to the shore. Instructed by the guru to begin eating from the leg he removed the cover from the dead body. Lo, to the astonishment of all it turned into fine palatable sweet food staff. It was thus that the disciple stood the test and was considered as the fittest person for the Gadi after him. Pleased with the disciple who was considered as the part and parcel of his body Nanak named him as 'Angad' and installed him on the Gadi.

Nanak's activity was over. He did not live long after this.

In 1539 he gave up his body by his yogic power at Kartarpur at the age of 71. Immediately after his entering Mahasamadhi some trouble arose. A quarrel ensued between the Hindu and the Muslim disciples for the body of the guru. The Hindu disciples wished to cremate it according to the custom prevalent among them whereas the Muslim disciples preferred to put it under the grave according to their custom. When the dispute rose to the boiling point of violence a mediator came forward to lift the cover from the body. Lo, to the astonishment of all the disciples and admirers assembled there they found some beautiful fragrant flowers which, along with the covering, were divided half and half and preserved in their respective holy places. The place where this incident took place is now a holy place for the Sikhs and a Gurudwar is built there. Every year thousands of devotees gather here and some fair is held there even now to mark the occasion.

Sikhism was the natural outcome of previous ages of thought. It began in simplicity and large-hearted tolerance on the noble principle of the Unity of God and Brother hood of man. Thorough, consistent, prudent, amiable, enthusiastic, inoffensive, strong in faith, bold to proclaim truth against opposition of the prejudiced and the interested, Nanak, was the just man of stupendous abilities to build a new living faith. He broke with the past and the present, rejected all formalism and dogmatism and advised to look up direct to God to whom all are equal. He preached 'there is no high, no low, no dark, no fair, no privileged, no outcaste ; all are equal both in race and in creed, in political rights and in religious aspirations. He had the foresight that the practical application of his doctrine would lead to the foundation of a new fraternity. He left behind him the reputation of a reli-

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gious leader and a reformer of the most pronounced type.

The instruction given by Nanak and collected by the disciples is now known as Adigrantha or Sikh Bible and is preserved and honoured as the guru himielf. The Granthasaheb consists of hymns of various tunes classified under subjects. Japji, Sodarerash, Kirti Sohila, Ashakibar, Vigkibani, Pransangli are important among them. Besides the instruction and the songs composed by Nanak it contains instructions given by the other nine gurus. Though Nanak, was the founder of the Sikh religion the contributions of the other gurus are great. The gurus are : (2) Angad, the disciple of Guru Nanak (3) Amardas, the disciple of Angad (4) Ramdas, the founder of the Guru Darbar at Amritsar (5) Arjun, the son of Ramdas, it was he who collected and compiled the instruction of Nanak and other gurus and brought them out in the form of Grantha saheb) (6) Hargovinda, the son of Arjun and the first among the gurus to take sword against the Muslims for protection of the Sikh religion, their rights and prestige (7) Hararoy, the son of Hargovinda (8) Harkisan, the son of Hararoy (9) Teg Bahadur, the brother of Hargovinda and (10) Guru Govinda Singh, the son of Teg Bahadur. The last guru turned the Sikhs into a warrior race. After him there being no competent person to continue the responsible work of the guru the post of the guru was abolished, and the Granthasaheb has taken the place of the guru.

Japji is the most important portion of the Granthasaheb. There are many Sikhs who chant it every day regularly as the Brahmins utter the Gayatri and take food only after performing Sandhyabandana. ' Every line of Japji is full of lofty ideals that kindle spirituality in men. In one place it says—

Paramatman is true ; Its name is also true ; It is unlimited ; Its glory should be sung ; by It alone one can attain liberation, without the meditation of Paramatman none can take bath in the holy river of Atman, there is no way out to get to the goal without the realization of the same. Every being possesses the precious jewels of knowledge but none can trace this most valuable treasure without the grace of a realized guru. Paramatman is the only giver and therefore should never be forgotten. Water cleanses the dirt of the body, soap that of the clothes but the dirt of the mind can be removed only by the uttering of the name of God and meditation on Him. One becomes virtuous or sinner according to the action one performs and one reaps the fruits of one's own action either meritorious or otherwise. The cycle of birth and death takes place due to ignorance and one can get rid of this by the grace of Paramatman.

Sodarerash and Kirti Sohila both composed by Nanak are to be read in the evening and at bed time. Vigkibani contains prayer to God. Pransangli contains the rules and regulations to be followed by the Sikhs.

TRAILANGA SWAMI

The village of Holia in Vijianagram in the Andra province heralded the birth of a very noble soul in the first half of the seventeenth century. There lived at that time a pious and respectable Brahmin land holder of the name of Narasimha Rao. His wife Vidyavati was equally pious. Both of them spent their time in the worship of God, in the service of the godly and in the practice of religion. But they had no peace of mind for they had no children. By the grace of Lord Siva, their family deity whom they worshipped every day with unflinching devotion they were at last blessed with a male child and they gave him the name of Sivaram. It was this child that came to be known later on as Trailanga swami.

It looked as though the grace of Siva fell on him from the days of boyhood. One day while he was at play Sivaram fell asleep and his mother Vidyavati noticed to her astonishment that a ray of light entered in the boy's body and this incident filled her mind with a sense of fear for the future of the boy.

From his boyhood he came to exhibit a sense of indifference to the pleasures of the world ; and this tendency grew as the years advanced. When his father proposed that he should take upon the life of a householder he flatly refused to entertain the idea of marriage. Under the guiding influence of his mother the boy came to develop a definitely religious attitude. He felt even in his younger days the transitoriness of the world. Although such an attitude of mind brought him in conflict with his father, his mother always took his side and supported him in his determination to lead a life of celibacy. In this way his mother removed from his path the very first obstacle which he encountered in his persuit of a life of renunciation.

His father passed away when he was forty years old and twelve years later when he was fifty two his mother also passed away. In this way all bonds which tied him to the world were snapped.

At that time as a Sadhaka he practised a life of spirituality in a lonely cottage or near a burning ghat or near a river side.

As he was interested in spiritual conquest and not in temporal wealth he made over all his property to his younger brother Sridhar who persuaded him not to do so. The tears of the younger brother and requests of his relations failed to move him from his resolve. After he stayed in his cottage for about twenty years practising a life of devotion he, on an auspicious day met Swami Bhagirathananda Saraswati who was a powerful yogi from the Punjab.

At the call of the guru who happened to come to his native place, he left the village of Holia for good and he went with the swami to the holy place of Pushkar and was initiated into Sanyas by him at the ripe age of seventy eight. He now assumed the name Ganapath Saraswati, as the swami hailed from the Telegu country he came to be known as Trailanga swami which is a corruption of the word Telengu swami. After practising austere Yoga for about ten years at Pushkar, when his guru cast off his body he went on a pilgrimage.

Although he was now eighty eight years of age there was no sign whatever of old age in his boby. As a result of Yoga practice over many years he was light and active of body and as a result of the Siddhis he had attained he was able to perform miracles.

It thus happened that when he was on a pilgrimage to Rameswar he was very much touched by the cry that arose from a neighbouring fair for the relatives of a Brahmin boy were bemoaning his death. This fat-bodied Sanyasin moved calmly in their midst and after uttering some holy words sprinkled some water from his Kamandulu ; to the wonder of all assembled there the dead boy revived and he sat up with his eyes open. In the mean while the Sanyasin disappeared as quietly as he came.

On a different occasion when he was practising deep spirituality in a deep forest near Nepal a member of the royal family commonly known as Rana came there with his hunting party. Although the Rana was a person of specified skill in shooting all the shots which he aimed at a tiger which appeared on the scene missed the aim. The Rana left his party and personally proceeded to watch the condition of the tiger. To his surprise he found it lying prostrate before a yogi and roaring loudly. He also saw the yogi petting the ferocious animal which had taken shelter under him. After assuring the Rana of his personal safety the yogi invited him to approach him and advised him to abstain from killing animals for they too were created by God. The yogi said that love is reciprocal and that if one can love the animals they too in their turn love him. When the minister heard it he came in person to honour the yogi. As a result of it people from nearby places invaded the seclusion of the sanctuary. The yogi thereupon left the place for he wished to avoid the crowd.

Trailanga swami afterwards went on a pilgrimage and visited many places in Nepal, Tibet including the Manas Sarobar and holy places in the Himalayas. When he was travelling in the Himalayas he saw a poor widow crying piteously for her only son who was seven years old, had just passed away. She was grief striken and unconsolable. Out of pity for her the yogi touched the boy and he regained conciousness and came to life. By that time a crowd collected but the yogi vanished and remained untraced.

Trailanga swami then came to a holy place on the bank of the river Narmada and he stayed in a corner of the well known Markandeya Asram where he continued his austere spiritual practice. In that Asram there was another well known yogi of the name of Kakibaba. This yogi noticed one day when Trailanga swami bent down to drink water from the river Narmada the current of the water turned into the current of milk and that Trailanga swami drank of it to his heart's content. Thereupon Kakibaba hurried to the river to drink of it, but at his touch the milk turned into water again. When his reputation spread far and wide the yogi left the place after staying there for a period of eight years. He then took up his abode at the confluence of the Ganges, Jamuna and Saraswati at Allahabad. On a stormy day a Brahmin devotee of the yogi of the name of Ramtaran Bhattacharya saw that the yogi was standing at a lonely place and requested him to come closer to a nearby human habitation. The reason for it was not, that the yogi was afraid of solitude but that in the river nearby a large number of passengers were in imminent danger of being drowned in a storm which was raging. The boat lurched fearfully as there was much pitching and tossing. It the twinkling of an eye the yogi entered the boat without the knowledge of the boatman and the passengers. By some miraculous power of the yogi all the passengers in the boat reached the shore safely. When the devotee asked him by what power it was that he effected the miracle, the swami gave a characteristic reply. He said 'Divinity abides at the heart of every being ; divine power by its nature lies hidden in man and every thing can be performed if the hidden power can be awakened. What seems to be miraculous and unnatural is merely the manifestation of this latent divine power'.

After some time Trailanga swami came to Benares and there he stayed for a long period of one hundred and fifty years. He came to be known as 'Sachal Viswanath' (the moving lord of the universe) in contrast with the Achal Viswanath', the presiding deity of Benares. After visiting Annapurna, Manikarnika, Kedarnath, Durga and other holy places the pilgrims who used to visit Benares made it a point to pay a visit to this great yogi. It thus happened that when the yogi was moving near the Loharkunda he saw a sight most pitiful for there stood Brahma sing, an inhabitant of Ajmere who was born deaf. He was besides suffering from leprosy and was the very picture of misery. When the swami stood before him his pain disappeared in a miraculous way and he sang hymns of of praise in honour of Lord Siva. Trailanga swami placed a Bilwa leaf before him and advised him to hold it on his head after taking his bath in the sacred Loharkunda. Brahma singh was completely cured and he became a great devotee of the yogi.

We are told of another such miraculous cure that was effected by the swami. There was a person named Sitanath Banerjee who was a psthysis patient. As a result of long suffering he was almost reduced to a skeleton. When he was going to the Ganges for a bath he fell down writhing with pain. When the swami touched him the misery that Sitanath was feeling disappeared all at once. The swami touched him and prescribed Ganges water as medicine. Again there was a respectable Maharastra lady who was worshipping Viswanath every day in order that her husband who was suffering from ulcer in the stomach might be cured by the grace of the Lord. One day on way to the shrine she dishonoured the yogi by speaking ill of the naked swami. On that night she had a dream. She was told that there was very little chance of her husband being cured in as much as she had reproached the swami. On the next day she approached the swami and begged pardon of him. Thereupon Trailanga swami took pity on her and gave her holy ashes. He told her that by besmearing the ashes her husband would be completely cured. There was again the case of a ruler of a nattve state. The ruler came to Benares with his Pardanashin family in order to bathe in the Ganges. When the women were taking bath under the screen with heavy guard protection the swami was seen standing before them. Owing to this the ruler had the swami arrested and put him under guard. Later on at the request of the people the swami was released but not before he was subjected to much ill treatment and insult. On that night the ruler had a frightful dream. He saw a matted figure trident in hand chasing him out of Benares as though Lord Siva wished to take revenge on the ruler for the dishonour done to the swami. The repentent ruler sought the yogi and begged pardon of him.

Trailánga swami was very fond of the Ganges. He used to float on the water sometimes going against the current. He was at once the Nature's child and a knower of Brahman and that was why one and all respected him. It thus happended that one day the Maharaja of Ujjain was going in his boat along the Ganges. The swami who was floating on the river got into the boat and was received with great honour. He showed a child like curiosity and wished to see the sword which was attached to the Maharaha's belt. It was a gift from the British rulers and the Maharaja was very proud of it. The swami took the sword in his hand, brandished it and finally cast it into the river. The Maharaja was naturally very angry but the swami laughed at it. He stretched his hand and from below the water he took two swords similar to the one which he had thrown in the river. He asked the Maharaja to choose the right one but he was unable to do that. Finally the swami selected the right one for the Maharaja and returned the other to the presiding deity of the river. It is needless to add the Maharaja regretted his folly and begged pardon of the swami. On another occasion the swami saw on his way to the Ganges a poor woman bemoaning piteously for on the previous night her husband had been bitten by a venomous snake and passed away. The swami rubbed some mud from the Ganges at the place where the snake had bitten him and then he himself jumped into the river and vanished. To the astonishment of all the dead man revived and he himself wondered why it was that he was thus brought to the cremation ground.

The district magistrate of Benares who happened to be an Englishman took it into his head that he would teach the swami due respects for the law which forbids that people should wander about clad only in nature's garb. One day when the swami was meditating near the Ganges at one of the ghats he sent some police officers with an arrest warrant. As the swami was not willing to come to the police station more men were sent to arrest him and bring him by force to the magistrate's court. Every time the magistrate tried to have him hand cuffed the swami miraculously disappeared before him though he was to be found in the same spot a little later. The bewildered European officer realised that the swami was no ordinary man. By that time a pleader who knew the swami well appeared on the scene. He spoke praise of the swami and said that as he was a spiritually advanced soul to him sandal paste and excreta were the same and that there was no necessity for the swami to wear clothes like ordinary people. The magistrate wished to verify it. He asked if the swami should take forbidden food. The swami agreed on condition that the magistrate also should partake of it. Thereupon in the open court he answered the nature's call and he offered the stool that he passed for any one to take it. It is said that all present in the court including the magistrate noticed that the swami partook it. It turned into nectar and a pleasant taste. He thereupon ordered that the swami might be released so that he might wander at free will. Another magistrate who came afterwards was very strict, he had the swami confined in the jail but found that on the next morning he was at his usual place. Hearing from him that behind matter lies the spirit and that he who is tuned with the infinite spirit and has become one with the same can not be confined within the bonds of matter, the magistrate came to realise the power of Indian yogi.

In the latter part of his life the swami lived near the Pancha Ganga ghat close to Benimadhava where the river flows by in the form of a half cresent moon. It was not far off from the sacred shrines of Viswanath and Annapurna. At this holy place the atmosphere resounds with the cry of 'Hara Hara Vyom Vyom' as the pilgrims chant in chorus after bathing in the holy water of the Ganges. After their bath in the Ganges the pilgrims used to pour holy water on the swami whom they regarded as the living Lord of the universe and to whom they used to offer sweets and fruits as a mark of devotion.

There was a Maharastra Brahmin of the name of Mangala Bhatta who was a devotee of the swami, he persuaded the swami to live in a room close to his residence. The swami agreed on condition that he should not be disturbed nor should be troubled with a number of sick people seeking faith cure from their ailments. The swami had a number of holy verses written on the wall of his room and whenever people put any question he avoided all conversation by pointing out to one of the verses.

It is said Sri Ramkrishna Paramhamsa, the sage of Dakshineswar met Trailanga swami during the course of his pilgrimage to Benares. The swami recognized the exalted nature of his visitor and as a mark of respect offered him snuff from his own box. Sri Ramkrishna also recognized that Trailanga swami was the living incarnation of the presiding deity of the place and as a token of affection fed him with milk Payasum. In reply to Sri Ramkrishna's question as to whether God is one or many Trailanga swami answered by means of signs that in the stage of Samadhi God is one but the moment the body consciousness comes with it also comes the sense of plurality.

Trailanga swami never went out to collect food, whatever came unsought he took and if on a particular day nothing was available he was not in the least troubled. The swami would not stretch his hand to take the food that was placed before him. He would eat whatever was placed before his mouth. On one occasion some wicked persons placed before him a bucket of lime water. He drank it all and passed the lime water as urine. They then felt remorse and begged pardon of him and never again played pranks with him. Some times rich people would come and honour him and decorate him with gold ornaments and a little while later criminals would come and strip him of every thing. To him it was all the same. On one occasion the king of Benares invited him to the palace and honoured him by presenting silk cloth and gold ornaments. A little while later thieves came and despoiled him of every thing. They were caught and brought before the king who in turn wished to know the mind of the swami as to how he should deal with the criminals. The yogi who remained the silent witness of it all pointed out that no harm was done to himself by the thieves and that they might as well be allowed to go scot free. The Maharaja had nothing to say and he wondered at the spiritual pre-eminence of the swami.

On another occasion the famous Brahma preacher Vijay Krishna Goswami met the swami and fed him with great kindness. One day he saw the swami passing urine in some Kali temple and sprinkling it on the image. The Brahma preacher was taken a back and he asked the swami why he desecrated the image. The yogi wrote on the earth that what was being sprinkled on the image was Ganges water for to a yogi of his calibre both the Ganges water and urine are the same.

Trailanga swami did not establish any monastery nor did he gather around him a band of disciples to preach his glory. When he realized that time had come for him to take leave of the world he left instruction that his body should be kept in a wooden chest and that it should be cast in the midstream of of the Ganges. On the eleventh day of the bright moon on the month of Poush in the year 1887 this living embodiment of Viswanath attained Mahasamadhi. Everyone felt grieved for it. In this way the 'Sachal Viswanath' became merged in 'Achal Viswanath', the Absolute.

BHASKARANANDA SARASWATI

The sixth day of the bright moon in the year 1833 happened to be an auspicious day for Misralal who was a learned, liberal and pious Brahmin of Mithelpur in the district of Cawnpore in the Uttar Pradesh for on that day a great soul was born as his son. On that occasion an aged Sanyasin appeared from some unkonwn place and prophesied the future greatness of the child. The child was named Motiram. He became later on the world famous Bhaskaranda Ṣaraswati, and as prophesied by the aged sanyasin he showed to many a devout soul the path to liberation.

From boyhood Motiram was distinguished by his intellegent and liberal outlook and by his liberal ways. His winning ways charmed friends and relations. But noticing that the boy was inclined to lead a life of renunciation, his father Misralal and his relatives and friends thought that they should tie him to the world by getting him married. They succeeded in it and a beautiful girl of some respectable Brahmin family was brought as his wife no doubt but they did not succeed in winning him away from a life of religion. He left for Benares to study the sacred books. After he returned home he felt more keenly than ever before the desire to renounce his all. For the more clearly he perceived the hollowness of the world the stronger was his love of liberation. He wished to leave home in quest of life's supreme object viz the realization of God. It thus came to pass that he left home for good in the eighteenth year of his life on the very night on which his first son was born. He found that the ca'l from above was a more imperious urge than the tie of wife, child and relations or name, fame and worldly prosprerity and all other objects of desire which generally tie people to the world.

Thus it was that young Motiram came to Ujjain which has been regarded as one of the holy places by the Hindus. Here on the banks of the holy Sipra there is to take place the famous Kumba mela (fair) which attract pilgrims in their thousands. Nearby stands the Mahakaleswar temple dedicated to the Lord Siva in His aspect of Jyotirlinga. Besides many other shrines there are beautiful bathing ghats. The atmosphere of the place is redolent with devotional songs. Such was the place which Motiram selected for his practice of Tapasya and here he met many Tantriks, Yogis and Sanyasins ; but he had not yet found the key which could unlock the kingdom of spiritual liberation. As he had not yet found out peace of mind he again set out on pilgrimage and left for Dwaraka, the holy place which is associated with the memory of Sri Krishna and which is considered to be one of the four Dhams (sacred places) of India. There he studied Vedanta under a famous Sanyasin for a period of about four years.

Again the spiritual aspirant returned to Ujjain. Here at the age of twenty seven he was initiated into Sanyas by the renowned swami Purnnanda Saraswati ; from that time onward he came to be known as Bhaskarananda Saraswati. As he wished to practise Tapasya in an undisturbed manner he selected a lonely place near a cremation ground for the practice of spirituality. After twelve years of such hard practice he wished to revisit his native place. In the mean time the son that was born to him had passed away. Thus it was that after thirteen years of hard travel he came to Hardwar (the gate of Hara or Hari). He had by that time attained complete mastery over Vedanta which he had specially studied under Acharya Ananta Ram.

Like many others in quest of the holy life Bhaskaranada swami felt the call of Lord Viswanath and he began a new chapter in his spiritual life by performing Tapasya on the banks of the Ganges at Benares. Without having the leats regard for his physical needs the swami sat cross legged on the banks of the Ganges and without caring for the changing seasons he set in meditation. As a result of such severe Tapasya he was not only physically emaciated but also lost the power of movement. The story of his life of renunciation spread far and wide and crowds gathered around him. In order to avoid the crowd he swam across the Ganges and stayed at Ramnagar otherwise known as Vyas kasi where he continued to practise spiritual Sadhana.

At the request of the prince of Ameti Bhaskarananda swami stayed at the garden house of the prince known as Ananda Bag. It was situated close to the Durga temple in Benares. The only condition that the swami insisted upon was that the public should not be allowed inside to disturb him. For that purpose special guards were appointed in order to keep off the crowd. When the crowd increased the swami graciously allowed them to come in. He emerged from the under ground room where he was meditating and instructed them on religious subjects. On a certain occasion the prince who was owner of the garden took it into his head that he would test the depth of the swami's spirituality. He engaged some women to tempt the swami one night and he himself lay concealed behind some trees. But all on a sudden a snake emerged from nowhere and coiled itself round the feet of one of them ; the rest including the prince made good their escape. Next morning the snake released her without biting her. She begged pardon of the swami and thereafter she became a changed woman leading an entirely virtuous life.

As the name of the great yogi spread far and wide crowds of people came to him from various walks of life and from different strata of society. He depended on God alone for every thing and he made the bare earth his own home whether it was summer or winter. The rich came to him with baskets of fruits and other rare delicacies, other devotees there were who came to receive them. On one occasion the Maharaja of Kashmir honoured him with a gift of a thousand rupees, the swami returned the amount as he had no need for money. One day his attendant Tewari kept separate some of the fruits for him sent by the Maharaja of Benares before they were distributed among the people. The swami scolded him for this and afterwards consoled him that he had already tasted them through the month of the devotees and he warned Tewari never to do so in future. As the swami did not wish to have it said of him that he favoured only the rich at the expense of the poor he had special days appointed and on the days alloted for the poor he refused the rich. It mattered little whether it was prince Nicholas of Russia or Sir William Lockhart, the commander-in-chief of India for they had to wait on the swami. On the other hand Sahai Teli, the poor and the despised was received with the same regard as the rich and the mighty. Among those who visited the swami was Mark Twain, the American humourist who recorded his impression of the swami in his 'More triumphs abroad'. He wrote that the swami regarded aristrocracy and position as mere trash, all were equal in the eyes of the great yogi and that the beauty of his soul transcended by far the beauty of the Taj which is one of the wonders of the world. Dr Fairburn, the great leader of Christianity in appreciation of the spiritual power of the swami remarks 'I have felt the real nature of purity in his presence which I can not compare to have felt in the entire world'.

Bhaskarananda swami continued to be on cordial relations with the Sachal Viswanth of Benares i, e, Trailanga swami and the eminent Vedantin Visuddhananda Saraswati. Among those who visited the swami at Benares mention may be made of Vijaykrishna Goswmi, the Acharya of the Brahma samaj. While the swami honoured those who were spiritually advanced and was honoured by them in turn, he did not pay special regard to those who were merely counted as rich people. Thus when a certain Maharaja placed before him a plate full of gold coins the swami rejected the offer outright for the reasons best known to him and to the Maharaja. Again there were at the holy city of Benares, many ill reputed Pandas (priests) who used to exploit the innocent pilgrims specially the rich and the beautiful ladies and under the influence of the swami they too became reformed.

On one occasion Ramesh Chandra Dutta, a famous judge of the Calcutta High Court was disputing with the swami on the view that the world is unreal. Even as he was disputing with the swami, the swami disappeared suddenly from his view thus proving the delusive nature of all phenomenal manifestation. On another occasion the Commander-in-chief of India who was talking with him spoke with pride of the great victory which he had gained over the Afridis. In order to teach him a lesson the swami asked him to lift a pencil that was lying before them. Not all the effort of the general availed and the swami said that the ultimate giver of victory is God Himself and to Him alone our existence is due.

On a different occasion Dr. Iswar Choudhury, the famous Homeopath of Benares approached the swami and entreated him to save his dying son whom all his medicine could not cure. The swami gave him a fruit and when the boy took the Prasadam he was miraculously cured. On another occasion a certain gentleman of east Bengal was about to prostrate before the swami when the swami asked him to desist from it; the swami said that his body had become impure (asoucha) as his father had passed away and asked him to go home immediately. Reaching his residence the gentleman received a telegram from his native place and he found that what the swami said was true, for his father had then passed away. Again there was the case of Chandi Charan Bose, an elderly official of Dacca, he was a diabetic patient ; when all treatment failed he wished to be initiated by the swami with the hope that the yogic touch might cure him. The swami said that the best person to initiate him was his family priest but that there was no need to return home for it in as much as his family priest was at that time at Benares and so it was. By the grace of the swami he was also cured of diabeties although his case was considered to be incurable.

Among the many devotees of the swami was Pratap Narayana Sing, the ruler of Ajodhya. When he was walking with the swami, the swami wished to see his diamond ring. When the Maharaja gave him the ring he threw it into the garden tank (Durgakunda) as if in sport. The Maharaja knew the power of the swami he did not worry for it. Seeing the calm face of the Maharaja the swami some time later told him that he would get back his ring if he should place his hand below the water of the tank. And to his surprise he received a number of rings all similar to the one which was thrown away. The swami selected the right one and he threw away the remaining ones into the tank. On another occasion the Maharaja received an urgent summons asking him to come by the next available train. The swami told him that he would do well to avoid that particular train and proceed by the next one. Some time later the Maharaja received the news that the train by which he wished to travel met with a mishap and was derailed and that there was a large number of casualities.

On a different occasion a number of Sadhus came to visit the swami. They had been discussing religious topics for a long time and the swami felt that he ought to feed his guests. He asked each one what he wanted and when they sat for food each one found before him the particular dish such as Kshir, Chhana, curd, Sandesh, Rasagolla, mango, orange etc which he liked best.

Towards the end of his life he paid a visit to his native place of Maithelpur ; although his visit was incognito he was recognized by the local people who wished to honour him. They wished to hear him preach on religion and so a high dias was erected for him to speak. Before the swami would ascend the platform he sought out an humble fisherman of the name of Lachman Mala and gave him the place of honour next to him for the swami recognized in him a devout soul who concealed a rich heritage of Jnan (knowledge) and Bhakti (devotion) behind the garb of a fisherman. Thus it was that the swami taught the great lesson of Samadarsana.

After some time the swami returned to Benares and spent his time in the holy company of Sadhus. In his last days he suffered from acute stomach trouble and on 25th Ashar 1899 he entered Mahasamadhi.

SIDDHA KRISHNADAS

Sanatan Kanungoe was a wealthy and respectable Kayastha land lord of Orissa. The call of death came to him when he was comparativly young ; and his faithful wife Jaridasi decided to commit Sutee as life had lost all charm for her. Before she mounted the funeral pyre she blessed two of her sons and exhorted them to lead virtuous life. As for her youngest and dearest son named Batakrishna she ordained a special mission. It was her last wish that he should leave home atonce and proceed to Brindaban and that he should seek the Vaisnava initiation under Mahaprabhu Chaitanya's school of thought. The last words of his mother influenced him profoundly.

Although Batakrishna was barely sixteen years of age and was as yet a student of the local school he decided to carry out his mother's behest. He felt an inner urge to fulfil what was to be his life's mission. When he arrived at Brindaban he was atonce accepted as a disciple by the well known Vaisnava sadhaka Charandas Babaji who conferred upon his disciple the name of Krishnadas. Under his guru's instruction he practised spiritual practices for many years. After the passing away of his guru Krishnadas arrived at Jaipur where he got an oppurtunity to visit the deity Govindaji. At that place also he continued his spiritual discipline for many years. So profound was his faith in the living presence of the deity that it looked as though the deity was speaking to him and there arose in him an inner desire to worship the deity personally. Even this wish came to be fulfilled in an unexpected manner. The Maharaja of Jaipur happened to meet him and was charmed with his sincerity and devotion. It was his royal pleasure that the young Vaisnava should be appointed to worship the deity. In this way a new privilege was conferred uoon him and he served the deity for the next ten years.

On one occasion after some special puja he took some Prasad that was offered.to the deity. Immediately after this he felt a strange kind of restlessness ; his mind was filled with lustful thoughts ; the Lord tests those whom He would bless. It was however a severe ordeal for Krishnadas. His repeated attempts to repel all such thoughts were in vain. In utter despair he fled from Jaipur and he sought the spiritual guidance of Jaikrishnadas Babaji of Brindaban. Under his instruction he resumed his life of severe austerity bathing thrice a day in cold water even in severe winter, sleeping on the bare earth which he made his bed, abstaining from all delicious food and chanting ever and anon the name of the Lord. That rigorons austerity undermined his health as he continued to deny his body even the minimum of attention, he broke down physically, lost his eye sight and he could hardly move from place to place. It was at this stage when he was at the breaking point that it looked as his Ishtadevata at last began to smile upon him. His constant prayer to Radha, the presiding deity of Brindaban had its fulfilment ; she appeared before him in the form o a woman, offered him some Prasad to eat and applied collirium on his eyes. Although he was too blind to see the deity that collirium had a miraculous effect, for before long he regained his sight and was able to move about freely. He fasted and prayed together in ordor to solve the mystery of the identity of the person who so miraculously appeared before him. On the third night the Goddess Radha appeared before him in a vision, revealed her identity and blessed him so that he might at all times feel her divine presence. The Goddess advised him to go Goverdhan and then vanished from his sight. The life of Krishnadas shows how ardous is the path ; it also shows how great is the reward.

Krishnadas spent some time at Goverdhan, lived in a thatched cottage and spent his time in company of learned Vaisnavas. Although he had not studied much there was in him an intense desire to master the sacred books of the Vaisnavas. He therefore began with the study of grammar but he found that it took much of his time which he wished to spend in prayer and meditation. He was so vexed with himself that in a mood of mental depression he wished to end his life by jumping into the river Jumna which flows nearby. At that moment his Ishta appeared before him and prevented him from taking any such drastic measure. She blessed him and said that henceforth by her blessing he would be able to unravel the mystery of the sacred books by direct intuition without having to resort to the medium of logical reasoning and gain an insight into spiritual reality. The vision then vanished.

On a particular occasion a learned pundit from south India came to Goverdhan and he invited Krishnadas for a religious disputation with him. Krishnadas wished to avoid a controversy with him as it would disturb even the tenor of his life. But the pundit was importunate and would not be denied. As a proof of his errudition he quoted a few verses from the Sam Veda, Krishnadas had now the better of him by pointing out the mistakes in his pronunciation of the verses which he chanted. It was by the grace of his Ishta that he was in this way able to silence his opponent. The pundit also came to realise the folly of challenging a realised soul like Krishnadas and he left Brindaban, a wiser man. From that time onwards many Vainavas both young and old came to Krishnadas and sought his guidance in the study of the Vaisnava scriptures and by the grace of his Ishta he explained to them the inner meaning of the sacred books by direct intuition. By consulting various Vaisnava books he compiled a system of prayer which would be most suitable for Vaisnava aspirants. In this way the spirit of the service gave a new outlet for his spiritual insight and many came to him in quest of spiritual enlightment. Among them special mention may be made of Bhagahandas Babaji of Kalna and of Lala Babu of Brindaban.

To the earnest seeker the days of miracles are never over. It thus came to pass that on a particular day he had the vision of Radha, his Ishta, as if she was engaed in the sport of Holy festival. The Vaisnava devotees who came to see him on that occasion were struck with wonder to see that his body was covered with saffron colour and was emitting a sweet smell, as though he had partaken in the revels of the Holy festival. On a different occasion he went to bathe in the Manas Ganga; his mind was so full with the thoughts of Radha and Krishna that in the trance he fell into the deep water of the river and there he lay for seven days. The Vaisnava devotees searched for him all over, but they could not find him in hill or dale. The whole of Goverdhan and the neighbouring country was searched in vain. On the seventh day they saw him returning from his bath in the river.

Another very interesting episode is told of him in connection with the Raja Jaswant Singh, the king of Bharatpur, who was also a Vaisnava devotee. The king thought that he would be blessed if he should have the privilege of serving him, but Krishnadas was not in need of any thing earthly, he advised and said that if the king should serve the poor people of Brindaban he should feel happy. After of fering such charity as royal munificence could, the king once again asked him to be allowed the privilege of helping him. The fact was the king wished to confer material benefit to the great Vaisnava devotee but Krishnadas wished to confer spiritual benefits upon the king. Krishnadas therefore desired that the queen should pay him a visit. Although the rule of Purdah prohibited such an interview he acceded to the request of Krishnadas. As soon as Krishnadas saw the queen his mind was filled with the thoughts of Radha his Ishta and he felt all the signs which the Vaisnava scriptures describe when the devotee stands in the presence of the deity whom he worships. The women who attended the queen were entranced to see the mystic communion. From that time onwards a great change came on the queen for she too became an ardent devotee of Krishna, and Vaisnavas, she spent the rest of her life in meditation and in the practice of charity.

The part that Krishnadas came to play in the amphitheatre of life was over. It was time for him to enter upon the last stage of life, he entered Mahasamadhi on an auspicious day thus fulfilling in his life what is the great quest of the sages of all times.

CHARANDAS BABAJI

Raicharan Ghose was the son of Mohan chandra Ghose who was a well-to-do Kayastha of the village of Mahiskhola in the Narail subdivision of the district of Jessore. He was brought up under the care of his mother Kanak sundari and his uncle Ishan chandra for his father had passed away when he was five years old. When he grew to be a young man he married Swarnamayee and lived happily with her for some time.

Raicharan Ghose grew to be a very able officer of a zamindari estate in Jessore. Whenever there was any trouble in any part of the estate, the zaminder used to send this particular officer who had earned an unenviable reputation for severity to put down the trouble. On one occasion after raiding the particular area and after snatching away from the tenants all the paddy which they had cultivated, he was so overcome with remorse that he felt a sense of revulsion towards his particular way of life. He felt that he was becoming inhuman to enrich his master and that while the benefit went to some one else he was brutalizing his own nature. In an instant he turned away from the past, and full of repentence he wished to renounce all his life of secular activities. On that very day he left home for good, he left for an unknown destination in order to find an escape from the secular hell into which he was plunged all the years.

On the way he thought what his horoscope said—that he would renounce the world and become a guru and an ideal to the world. The time was ripe for its fulfilment. The great Mother appeared to him in a dream and instructed him to go to Bhavanipur, the renowned Saktipita in north Bengal and practise spiritual austerity there. After much trouble he reached Bhavanipur. It was solar eclipse day. On that day he was again blessed with the vision of the Mother who again commanded him to go to the bank of the river Saraju where stood the holy city of Ayodhya, where he would find his spiritual guide waiting for him. And it came to pass exactly as foretold, for on reaching Ayodhya he found the famous

Sankararanya Puri who was formerly known as Yogendranath Goswami and who was a famous Vaisnava Acharya of Khardah.

When Raicharan Ghose reached the bank of the river Sarayu he was astonished to find a healthy Vaisnava sanyasin with a wooden Kamandulu in his hand waiting for him in a lonely kutia (cottage) which stood on a grove on the bank of the river. When he was returning from his bath the stranger accosted him and asked him to follow him, it looked as though he was waiting for him. Raicharan was initiated according to the Vaisnava rites. His body was decorated with Tilak i, e, sandal paste marks on the forehead, arms etc and he was offered a garland of Tulsi beads to wear on the neck. That contact was like a touch stone, for it brought to the forefront the latent golden qualities in him. He felt that he was a new man. He wept, laughed and danced, his hairs stood on end and he felt the onrush of the divine inabriation. When Sankararanya Puri saw the advanced condition of his disciple he asked him to spread among the masses, the message of the glory of God by means of Nam Sankirtan.

With the blessings of the guru the disciple left the Asrama although reluctantly and he reached Nabadwip, the holy land of Mahaprabhu who was the very incarnation of love and devotion. Here he led a rigorous life of devotion and of spiritual discipline. He lived in a shelter given him by Jagadananda Babaji, which was near Srivas's place and he spent his time in religious observances and in the study of the Vaisnava scripture.

There was a young man named Nabadwipdas who became very much attached to him and as a mark of devotion became his disciple and an active member of his Sankirtan party. After some time the party left for Nilachal (Puri). On the way when he reached the shrine of Saksi Gopal he had a vision of of Mahaprabhu and it was here that Nityananda initiated him in a dream and then disappeared in the company of Mahaprabhu. Finally the party reached the temple of Jagannath at Puri, it atracted the attention of all by the fervour of devotion. As he was not at all particular about his appearance, his torn dress sometimes led to ill treatment from a few, but he charmed one and all by the humility of his behaviour. Bhagavandas Babaji and Jagannath Bhatta who were then staying there were specially pleased with him and the latter invited him to stay with him.

Behind one of the pillars in the temple of Jagannath at Puri there is a sacred spot where the memorial footprints of Mahaprabhu are preserved. The Sankirtan party at times used to trample upon it in the course of their Bhajan. Charandas Babaji took the permission of the Maharaja of Puri who was the custodian of the temple, and he had the memorial plague re-enshrined at the northern part of the main temple. He revived Gurudiksa marjana ceremony, it was from that time onward that the car festival of Jagannath came to be performed with renewed energy under the care of this humble Babaji.

On one occasion Babaji insulted an elderly Vaisnava Sadhaka who was a relation of his former days. When he realised his mistake he begged pardon of him and by way of attonement took diksa (initiation) and vek (form) from him. It was in this way that the seed sown by Sankaranya Puri watered by Gour haridas fructified into devotion in the person of Charan das Babaji. It so happened that a young man had a vision of Charandas Babaji in a dream and he came to him with tears in his eyes and wished to be initiated by him. Charandas

Babaji took him under his care and he came to be known later on as famous Chaitanyadas Babaji.

Some time later an unusual incident transpired. When Charandas Babaji was returning from the temple after attending a Kirtan, a bitch followed him and took shelter in his Asrama. Babaji named her Bhaktima which meant the mother of devotion. After some time she died and Babaji arranged for her Sradh ceremony. On that occasion he invited a large number of Vaisnava sadhus for dinner and among the invited guests they found there were a large number of dogs. The Vaisnava devotees felt hurt and insulted. They left in a body, although Babaji tried to pacify them by saying that if God could be in a pillar He could also be with equal logic in the lower animals such as the dogs. However the canine guests were received with honour and sumptuously fed to the cry of 'victory to Nityananda.' After they had partaken of the feast they left the place one by one in the most orderly way. The Vaisnavas realised the depth of his devotion and came to ask pardon of him and to be permitted to participate in the feast.

Babaji spent some time at Krishnagar in the company of his disciples in singing Kirtan. There was an old banian tree on the outskirt of the village under the shade of which people used to gather and sing Kirtan. Some Muslim ruffians of the locality who bore a grudge cut off the branches of the tree on the pretext that the Hindus are idolators. Charandas Babaji went there with his Kirtan party, sang Bhajan and danced round and round that banian tree. To the assembled devotees it looked as though the remaining branches danced to the tune of the music and the very leaves shed water in symphony with the song. It looked as though the tree was throbbing with life. Even the Muslims who had assembled there were struck with wonder. From that time onward the miraculous tree came to be known as Kalpataru and people used to pour water or offerings of flowers in order to attain the fulfilment of their desires.

Some time later one of his disciples Nabadwipdas fell ill of some serious disease and there was no sign of his recovery. While Babaji was chanting the Nam kirtan he suddenly embraced the dyeing disciple and to the wonder of all those who were present there Nabadwipdas opened his eyes and was completely cured shortly thereafter. But in the sequel the guru himself fell ill of Pneumonia which showed no sign of abatement. It was late at night when a devotee came from Calcutta. He brought with him a large quantity of pickles. Babaji who was in Bhava samadhi ate the entire quantity of pickles. The devotees were afraid that it might be the end. But to their astonishment on the next day he was perfectly in normal health and took his bath in cold water as though he had not been ill at all.

Among the many people who came under his influence there was one young man of Faridpur, who was known as Ramdas. On finding in him signs of greatness and of spirituality Babaji gave him initiation and he came to be known as Ramdas Babaji.

There was another devotee of the name of Joy Gopal who took special delight in serving the image of the Lord and in serving the Lord's devotees. But he kept aloof from the Kirtan party. Charandas Babaji drew him into the circle and named him Lalita sakhi i, e, one who serves the Lord in the way in which the Gopis did. There came another young man from Bhagalpur who was atonce sick and deaf. He came leaning on a bamboo stick. He was drawn into the magic circle of the party which was singing the Nam kirtan. He was overpowered with emotion and he fell down unconcious. Babaji touched him and initiated him with a mystic Mantra. Instantly he jumped aloud shouting the name of the Lord and he was completely cured of his deafness. He came to be known as Kunja das and was engaged in the service of the shrine of Mahaprabhu which is attached to the shrine of Jagannath at Puri.

Although Charandas Babaji stayed at Puri for a long time he had no particular place to live in. At the request of his devotees who were eager to place him in charge of the Jhatapita monastery which was also known as the Virakta Siddha Ashram, wherein the images of Radha and Krishna were installed Babaji accepted the offer not because he was fond of worldly honours but because the monastery had fallen on evil days, its property was about to be sold and the temple service had been neglected. In this new capacity he toured the villages of Orissa with his Kirtan party. He found in a particular village a violent quarrel going on between the Saktas and the Vaisnavas.

Both the parties appealed to him to settle the dispute. He told that in reality there was no difference at all between Sakti and Vishnu, just as there is no difference between fire and its power of burning. He pointed out how the worshippers of Vishnu worship Sri or Sakti and how Siva dances in the name of Ramchandra. It would therefore follow that the difference is only imaginary and not real for the name and form are conceived only for the benefit of aspirants. Every one can have his own Ishta acording to his choice. The villagers were satisfied with this solution and forgot their animosity and embraced each other.

There was an old Vaisnava of the name of Gadhadhar das. He was bitten by a snake and he fell down unconscious. Charandas Babaji who was in exalted mood kicked him mercilessly and miraculously enough the snake bitten patient regained consciousness and after a while joined the Kirtan party. On another occasion an young man was attacked with cholera and he was in a precarious condition. The Bhakta who was known as Lalita Sakhi declared that if the devotee should pass away of such a dreadful disease he would publicly denounce the creed which he had embraced. Charandas Babaji who was sitting in the yogic pose of meditation touched the toe of the patient. After a while the patient regained consciousness and there flashed a beem of joy from the eyes and face of the patient. Thus it was that the devotee was saved from imminent death. Other incidents not less miraculous are also recorded. When Babaji was at Baranagar garden house in Calcutta he saved an Oriya boy who was bitten by a snake. On another occasion he revived for a while a person who was declared to be dead. This is how it happenced. There was an elderly Marwari woman in north Calcutta. Her relations thought that she was dead and they carricd her to the cremation ground. Meanwhile Babaji sent a message that they should not burn her body until he came. After a while he came with his Kirtan party and went round and round the dead body singing the name of God. At the end of every round he touched her toe, after a while she revived conciousness and was able to recognize her relations. Finally when Babaji withdrew contact she breathed her last. The entreaties of her relations were of no avail for as Babaji said—what is lotted can not be blotted; what the Lord has blotted is blotted out once for all.

The Jhatapita monastery at Puri was passing through great financial difficulty. Babaji declared that they should appeal to the deity. Within some time a devotee appeared with a bundle which contained a big sum of money. Another significant episode is narrated in connection with the worship of the deity. Babaji was very particular that the worship of the deity should be carried out with the utmost purity. When Lalita Sakhi was washing his leg some of the water splashed without his knowledge upon the Prasadam that was to be offered. From that time he suffered from terrible pain in the leg. The doctors failed to diagnose the case. Later on when he came to recollect the particular incident he was struck with deep remorse. Although Charandas Babaji knew the cause of the suffering he did not disclose it for whatever is offered to the deity is Chinmaya and negligence on the part of a Vaisnava is unpardonable.

It may be stated that Girish chandra Ghose, the famous dramatist was a contemporary of Babaji. Although Girish chandra had written a drama on the life of Mahaprabhu and felt very proud of it he came to realise that Charandas Babaji was indeed a very great devotee and that he had a profound insight in the ways of the Lord. Girish chandra thought that Brindaban did not fully display the glory of Sri Krishna and that it was revealed fully later on in his life of action. Charandas Babaji held a different view for to the God intoxicated devotee all aspects of the Lord are equally glorious.

As the years passed his spiritual moods deepened, when he knew that his time was come he gathered his disciples together, preached to them the glory of the Lord's name and he told them that the name and the Lord are inseparable and that this alone is the eternal Truth and thus after having taught the Sanatan Dharma he attained Mahasamadhi on an auspicious day.

JIVA GOSWAMI

Rup, Sanatan and Ballavadeva were regarded by the public of Chandradwip in Barisal as respectable citizens ; to the state they were highly responsible officers of the Nawab of Gour ; and to Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya, the incarnation of love and devotion they were his spiritual compeers. They had been brought up in luxury in the Bakla palace, for as far as the good things of the world went they had almost a royal heritage. But what was most interesting was the fact that they came to acquire a vast empire of spiritual devotion.

The hero of our story, Jiva Goswami was the son of Ballavadeva who was in charge of the Nawab's treasury. Ballavadeva had been conferred the title of Anupam by Mahaprabhu on account of his unrivelled devotion and implicit faith in his Ishta, Ram. When Jiva Goswami was barely five years of age he lost his father who passed away while he was on a pilgrimage from Gour to Brindaban. As Jiva Goswami was born with good Sanskaras he inherited in full measure the spiritual heritage of his father and of his uncle Rup. Even from his boyhood he had come to have a sense of non-attachment to the things of the world coupled with an extraodinary sense of devotion. It is said even as a boy he was very fond of dressing himself in the Vaisnava manner, play was with him a preparation for life. It is also said that as far as his physical feature went he was uncommonly good looking, had broad eyes and a pointed nose which coupled with his keen intellect and spirit of independence revealed the great future that lay before him. It may also be stated in this context that even as a boy of two he had been brought by his mother to be blessed by Mahaprabhu and in all probablity it was this blessing which shaped the course of his later years.

After completing his usual course of studies in the Sanskrit Patsalas of those days which consisted of grammar, drama and poetry he came at the age of twenty to Nabadwip for what may be called the post graduate study. At that time Nabadwip was the abode of nine muses. It was also the birth place of the great Avatar Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya. The votary of learning soon decided that he would devote himself to the attainment of spiritual perfection. He wished to remain a life long celebate and by a life of renunciatiou seek the highest goal of life.

It was about this time that Nityananda returned from Khardah with his party of pilgrims and was staying as the guest of Srivas. Jiva Goswami was kindly received by Srivas and was introduced to Nityananda. After receiving their blessings Jiva started on a pilgrimage with a view to visit all the places that were connected with the Adi-lila (places associated with the memory of Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya during his early years). When the pilgrimage was over he felt a desire to visit the places associated with the Anta-lila of Mahaprabhu and he went to Nilachal where Mahaprabhu remained absorbed in meditation and prayer till the last days of his life.

On the advice of Nityananda, Jiva Goswami left for Brindaban, the holy land of Sri Krishna also associated with the Madya-lila of Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya. It was not however a mere pilgrimage for he was destined to be a great torch bearer of the Vaisnava philosophy. It was therefore necessary for him to be grounded in Vedantic knowledge so that he might organize the great spiritual heritage that been handed down by Mahaprabhu and make it a force for good in the lives of the people of succeeding ages. It was in preparation for his great calling that he spent five years at Benares, the centre of Vedantic learning under no less person than the renowned Sanyasin Madhsudan Saraswati, the author of Advaita Siddhi and one of the great scholars of the time. By dint of his perseverence Jiva Goswami, within a short period of four or five years mastered the subject which normally takes twelve years. He was then free to embark upon what was his life's mission. He left for his dream land i. e, Brindaban and sought the spiritual guidance of the distinguished Vaisnavas of the age such as Rup and Sanatan. His spirit of renunciation, devotional temperament, eagerness to serve Sri Krishna as well as his charming and forceful personality attracted other seekers after spiritual perfection such as Raghunath Bhatta, Gopal Bhatta Raghunath das, Krishna das Goswami and other stalwarts who had been contemporaries of Mahaprahhu Sri Chaitanya. It was called the golden age of Vaisnavism and Brindaban was the radiating centre of knowledge and devotion.

Under the instruction of Sanatan, Rup took upon himself the responsibility of training the young Vaisnava. Although then, as now, polemics and religion were closely intermixed, Rup did not covet the honours of intellectual contests and was interested in attaining serene thoughts of wisdom yet he found himself at times compelled to take sides in religious controversies. At times he yielded the palm to the opponent and conceded him the victory which he did not deserve. This mild and unassuming temper of Rup did not please younger disciples like Jiva Goswami.

Jiva Goswami had to pay a very heavy price for his love of controversy for it so happened that on one occasion Ballav Bhatta, the Vaisnava scholar of the south took the liberty of pointing out some errors in the Mangalacharan verses of the Bhakti Rasarnava Sindhu which had been published recenly and Rup Goswami himself was the author of this great work. Rup Goswami who respected the venerable Acharya Ballav graciously agreed that he might be in the wrong. But Jiva Goswami took a different view. He did not wish to accept the defeat so easily. Thus when his uncle had gone for his bath Jiva Goswami warmed up to controversy. He pointed out with the aid of authoritative quotations from various sacred books how what was stated in the work under dispute was in harmony with the Sastras. Ballav Bhatta felt the reasonableness of the opponent's point of view but he also felt humi liated for his opponent did not mince matters. He felt the uncommon genius of the young disputant but he felt hurt by his uncomplimentary remarks. When Rup came to know what had happened he scolded his defender for forgetting the respect due to age and for his lack of self-control and humility for they are part and parcel of the spirit of renunciation. In the absence of these higher virtues mere intellectual pre-eminence is not enough. Rup said that mere external marks of a Vaisnava are by themselves futile. In mood of righteous indignation the guru asked the disciple to leave him and go to a forest and practise severe austerity without caring for food or drink. The repentent disciple was spending his time in some lonely forest in meditation. He neglected his physical well being; consequently he fell ill; and his health deteriorated so rapidly that even his friends could not recognize him. It was in that condition that Sanatan met him and consoled him. By that time the anger of Rup also had melted away and he invited Jiva Goswami to come back and help him in writing the sacred books of the Vaisnava literature upon which he was then engaged. Moreover Rup who felt satisfied with the devotion of Jiva Goswami appointed him in the shrine of Sri Radha Damodar where the deity had been installed in a temple that had been newly constructed. The invaluable books on Vaisnavism written by him are even now preserved in this temple.

After the passing away of Sanatan and Rup the Vaisnava sects found that they were without a leader. The elderly stalwarts such as Lokanath, Gopal Bhatta and Raghunath das were now too old to be associated with the routine duties of organisation. It was in these circumstances that Jiva Goswami became the accepted leader of the sect. Whenever any literary work was produced it had to obtain the approval of Jiva Goswami; and whenever any outsider intent on literary disputation appeared on the scene he had to encounter Jiva Goswami in the arena of intellect.

The reputation of the Vaisnava Goswamis travelled far and wide; and even the emperor at Delhi, Akbar came to know of it. When Jiva Goswami came to Delhi the emperor was pleased with Jiva Goswami who was the mouth piece of the Vaisnavas. In token of the appreciations the emperor was pleased to withdraw the earlier prohibitory order according to which no more new Vaisnava temples could be erected.

Up to this time books continued to be written of the palm leaves ; on account of this handicap it was difficult to propagate religion. Jiva Goswami overcame this obstacle by importing paper from Delhi. In the work of the propagation of religion Jiva Goswami brought to his task a rare poetic outlook and philosophical insight. In as much he also brought to his task the moral qualities of grit and determination he was able to impart the vigour of his personality to the movement of which he was the leader. Jiva Goswami gave sixty years of his life to this task and he was the author of more than twenty works on Vaisnava religion and philosophy. Special mention may be made of his commentary on the Bhagavata, on the Satsandharva which is composed of six books. There are, in addition, other commentaries as well as a work on grammar. There are also a number of hymns such as Gopal champu which depicts the glory of God. In this context special mention may be made of a number of distinguished scholars who collaborated with him—such as Srinivas Acharya of Chikandi, near Kalna, Burdwan, Shyamananda Goswami of Orrisa and Narottam, the only son of the Zamindar of Garanhati, north Bengal. As Jiva Goswami wished to propagate the teachings of Mahaprabhu he sent all these collaborators of his to various parts of the country specially in Bengal and Orrisa. The foresight and organising capacity of Jiva Goswami were a great asset in the re-orientation of Vaisnavism and in bringing about an all round spiritunal awakening among the masses.

It was in the course of their wanderings in Bengal that an unusual incident happened. When the party was travelling in a forest near Vishnupur a band of decoits set upon them and carried away their wooden chest but to their consternation they found that it contained only some books where they expected to find valuable gold and silver. But it so happened that the king of Vishnupur was very much interested in the tenets of Vaisnavism and he asked the preacher Srinivas to explain to him his creed. The preacher charmed the king and he narrated to him incidently how his books were stolen on the way. The king however found means of establishing contact with the decoits and he had the books restored to the preacher Srinivas. With Brindaban as the centre Jiva Goswami drew a circle including in it Bengal, Orrisa and Rajasthan, as the area over which Vaisnavism would spread in the years to come. It was under his inspiring guidance that Raja Mansing built a temple to Govinda at Brindaban as well as many other shrines dedicated to Radha and Govinda in and round Brindaban.

The life's mission of Jiva Goswami had now been fulfilled. At the age of eighty four he could look back to a life rich in achievemnt. On an auspicious day in 1566 he attained Mahasamadhi and his body was cremated in the compound of the Radha Damodar temple at Brindaban of which he had been a priest for many years and the great architect of Vaisnavism.

BHAGAVANDAS BABAJI

Wherever the seed of devotion is sown it sprouts into a mighty tree of spirituality. It may take time to germinate but it never ceases to sprout. Such was the case with the Bhakti movement which was started by Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya in the fifteenth century A. D. It produced many great souls both in Bengal and in the neighbouring state of Orissa.

In the first part of the nineteenth century an unknown boy of a remote village in Orissa came into contact with the movement. His name was Bhagavanandas Babaji, but very few details of his early life are recorded. As a result of the ripening of his Sanskaras he came to have religious leanings early in life and he came to Brindaban in quest of a guru. The guru is very essential for every aspirant who desires to cross the ocean of Sansara and reach the kingdom of light Divine. He found his guru in Krishnadas Babaji who was an advanced Vaisnava soul, living at Goverdhan which lies at a distance of few miles from Brindaban. Krishnadas Babaji was spending his days in the practice of spirituality and meditation on God. Out of grace for this inquistive aspirant he gave shelter to this promising boy whom he took as his disciple. Under his guidance Bhagavanandas Babaji was leading a simple life and was practising spirituality with unflinching devotion. With the lapse of years the young aspirant acquired mastery over various devotional scriptures and he could fathom the very depth of spirituality. After some time the guru instructed Bhagavanandas Babaji to proceed to Kalna in the district of Burdwan and spend some time at the famous Vaisnava colony there.

It was here that a very interesting incident took place. After finishing his usual prayer he was resting in a half reclined pose with his eyes half-closed. It was just then that the Maharaja of Burdwan came there in order to meet that honoured soul. He was taken by surprise on hearing the Babaji uttering with a loud voice 'drive it out, drive it out, beat it mercilessly'. The Maharaja did not understand what it was all about and he was afraid that the Babaji was perhaps crying out in pain at the appearance of the worldly men like himself. Within a short time Babaji plunged again into the serenitty of meditation. This made the Maharaja to change his mind.

He waited patiently in order to find out the mystery of it. After some time when Babaji came down to normal conciousness he asked why it was that he was provoked into anger and whether it had any connection with his presence there. It was now the turn of the Babaji to feel sorry for having inconvenienced his visitor. He said that he was not even concious when the Maharaja came and that he was driving out a goat which was eating the Tulsi leaves meant for the worship of Govinda at Brindaban. In his yoga-dristi he had seen the havoc caused by the goat and he was addressing the attendant to drive it out. The Maharaja wondered how Babaji could be at Brindaban when he was meditating at Kalna. He wished to verify it. He sent a message by wire and he came to know that it was lilterally true. From that time onward his regard for Babaji increased a thousand fold.

Various other miraculous incidents are recorded of the life of Babaji. To take an instance, the food that was offered to the deity would be brought to him as Prasadam. But he would wait patiently without even touching it, as though he were waiting for some one. After some time a very poisonous snake would come, no body knew from where, accept part of the food and disappear as silently as it came. Thereafter Babaji would accept his share of food. One day a devotee who observed it threw the snake out with a stick without the knowledge of Babaji. When Babaji came to know about it he felt very much mortified and he said with a mortified heart that it was Anantadeva himself that was taking a share of his food. He then warned the disciple not to repeat the mistake second time. He did not forget the painful incident for a very long time. At times he would repeat the name of his Ishtadeva and remain absorbed in meditation. He would not even touch the food that was placed before him until he felt the divine bliss within. Some times he would feel extreme hunger at dead of night when all food would have been exhausted. Some sweets would have been purchased from a shop and placed before him. He used to offer it before his chosen deity and then accept it himself.

He used to practise such utter self effacement that not an iota of egotism remained in him. Thus it so happened that on one occasion Vijoy krishna Goswami paid him a visit. Although others did not consider him in any way the equal of Babaji, Babaji prostrated before him in the humblest manner. The reason for it was that Vijoy krishna Goswami was a descent of Advaita who was close associate of Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya. When others made cutting remarks Babaji felt hurt. He sought pardon of Vijoy krishna and commanded his followers not to talk ill of him. This behaviour of Babaji pleased Vijay krishna very much.

Gradually the name and fame of Babaji spread throughout the country and people assembled from various parts of the country in order to be in touch with the spiritual head of the Ashram. By virtue of his deep spirituality he was able to direct the Vaisnava religious sect and he came to be regarded therefore as one of Acharyas.

On a certain occasion some of the valuable ornaments of the Ashram deity were found missing. The inmates of the Ashram wished to recover the lost property with the help of the police but Babaji was in no way aggreeable to this proposal. He pacified them with a smile and consoled them by saying perhaps the deity did not wish to be decked in ornaments and that the ornaments would come back when the deity wished to have them. He therefore suggested that the deity might as well remain without ornaments for some time. The fact was that it was the worshipper of the temple who had himself stolen the ornaments. After some months he returned to the Ashram, restored the stolen goods and sought the pardon of Babaji. Babaji generously forgave him for as he said, he perceived that the deity wished to have the ornaments again ; and to the surprise of the other inmates of the Ashram Babaji restored him in his office again.

Another apect of Babaji's nature is revealed to us by the following episode. There was an inmate of the Ashram named Vishnudas. He suffered from fever several days without remission and yet he refused to take medicine for he said if God so chose He could cure him. Babaji said that he ought to subject himself to proper medical treatment and that he should not play the role of a big yogi and trouble God in order to cure him when God has provided necessary means for his cure.

The conduct of Babaji was at times inexplicable to his disciples. He wished on one occasion to sit on a raised platform or mantap in the midst of a tank and meditate upon God. After some time when the tank was almost complete a calf happened to fall in it and die ; and Babaji thereupon ordered that the tank should be filled up soon. It is said again that the Ashram inmates used to purchase firewood from a poor woman to whom they paid money according to the market rate at so much per bundle. When Babaji came to know that he had a large number of dependants who all lived upon her labour he immediately ordered that she should be paid double the sum. The inmates paid her double the amount though they took care to keep her away from the sight of Babaji ever after.

Chaitanyadas Babaji was a highly advanced Vaisnava who was in close touch with Bhagavandas Babaji. Each regarded the other with great veneration. It so happened that Babaji once came to Nabadwip to worship Mahaprabhu in the temple. He then wished to visit Chaitanyadas Babaji who was living in a cottage close to the temple. At the time when Bhagavandas Babaji went there Chaitanyadas Babaji was busy in sweeping the temple and he was very much up at the intrusion. Perhaps it was because he was afraid that the large party which invaded his room came to take away the image in the shrine. Bhagavandas Babaji however remained unperturbed and he replied with all the sweetness at his command that he had not even dreamt of taking away from him his chosen deity. He said that he (Chaitanyadas) should attend to the deity with greater devotion lest the deity should of its own accord go away to Kalna where Bhagavandas Babaji lived. This sweet behaviour had its immediate effect. Chaitanyadas Babaji shed tears of sorrow at this earnest exhortation and after a while he embraced Bhagavandas Babaji with the devotion. His disciples who were with him were taken with surprise to see the marvellous change that was brought about even though they could not fully understand what had transpired between the great souls.

It is said Sri Ramkrishna Paramhansa once paid a visit to Kalna and there met Bhagavandas Babaji who had then become very old. Although Babaji was confined to bed he instinctively felt in Sri Ramkrishna the advent of a very great soul who was spirituality personified. Bhagavandas Babaji passed away in ripe old age and even now a picture of Sri Ramkrishna is kept in the shrine at Kalna in commemoration of the event.

RAMDAS KATIABABA

Ramdas was born in a respectable middle class Brahmin family in the village of Lona chamari which is situated some forty miles from Amritsar in East Punjab. The exact date of his birth is not known. All that we know is that his father was a simple householder and that his mother was a pious lady. As a boy Ramdas used to visit a Sanyasin who was living in the neighbourhood; that Sanyasin used to meditate on Ram and he told Ramdas that he, too, one day would feel blessed by the grace of Ram. From that time onward the boy used to pray to Ram regularly. One day when he was sitting under a tree, grazing the cattle, a hungry Sanyasin approached him and requested him to get him some food. The boy immediately went home and without the permission of his parents brought him some food from his house. The Sanyasin was highly pleased with the boy's hospitality, blessed him and foretold that he would one day become a great yogi. In the course of time his blessing came to be fulfilled. From that time onward the boy began to feel a strange restlessness for God and the life of householder no longer pleased him.

In the fulness of time young Ramdas was invested with the sacred thread and after that as was the custom he began the study of sacred books under an Acharya. When he returned home at the end of his studies his parents thought that it was time that he entered upon the next stage of life, that of a householder. But the boy remained adament; neither persuasion nor threat availed for he had resolved that he would be a Sanyasin and he did not wish to enter upon the householder's life.

One day while he was meditating under a banian tree on the outskirts of the village he heard a voice directing him to proceed to Jwalamukhi and practise austerity at that holy place in order that he might realize the object of life's quest. On the way to Jwalamukhi he met a Sanyasin with matted locks and with bright fascinating eyes. At the earnest request of Ramdas, the Sanyasin accepted him as his disciple. From now on he became the Sanyasin disciple. The guru opened to him the gate of immortality. It did not take much time for the news to reach his parents, immediately his father rushed upon to the spot and wished to take him home. After a good deal of persuasion, with the permission of his guru he returned home, saw his mother and pacified her. He used to spend his time daily in meditation under a banian tree. One day he had a vision of Gayatri Devi who blessed him. On a different occasion however a young woman who used to meet him at odd hours tried to tempt him. He pelted stones at her and drove her out. Later on he thought that discretion was the better part of valour and he left the village for good.

In the course of wandering as a Paribrajaka as instructed by his guru he came to a native state but here, too, the old temptation that assailed him came in a new form. The beautiful widow of the dead king of the state who served him with great care began to feel attracted towards him. Thanks to the grace of God and the guru he escaped unassailed from this new temptation also. He left the place at the bidding of his conscience and reached a high hill which was near by. On the hill he discovered a cave with its door closed, he pushed open the door and found to his surprise an old yogi seated there in the pose of meditation. His matted locks and skin hanging loose gave him a venerable appearance. Ramdas came out and was waiting outside as he did not wish to disturb the yogi in his meditation. After some time the yogi came out and asked him who he was. Ramdas humbly answered that he was an humble seeker after truth and added that he would feel happy if he should be accepted as his disiciple and be privileged to serve him in any manner as the guru might deem fit. To prove his sincerity he jumped at his command into a well but was saved by the yogi by stretching his hand. The guru was highly pleased at the sincerity of the disciple, blessed him and advised him to go elsewhere.

It was in way that he came to meet his guru Devadasji who was a well known yogi belonging to the Nimbark school of thought. This yogi had however a special attraction for Ganja and Charas, the most intoxicating substances but he was capable of remaining absorbed in meditation for months together before his Dhuni. His miraculous power charmed Ramdas. One day this yogi asked Ramdas to get some milk in order to get rid of the excessive sensation of heat which he was feeling all over his body. The disciple collected from the neighbouring villages half a maund of milk but the guru sipped it easily in an instant. As the heat had not yet subsided he asked for more and it was only after drinking some more seers of milk that he felt a sense of relief. On another occasion the guru asked him at dead of night to get him some Ganza ; his way lay through a dense forest. Ramdas traversed the distance through windswept hill. He smoked a little Ganza out of what he had procured to relieve his weariness due to extreme cold in hilly region. Devadasji could read what was working in the mind of others and he took the disciple to task. Ramdas begged his pardon but he came to realise that he could hide nothing from his guru who was all knowing.

On another occasion the guru and the disciple went together on pilgrimage to some holy place. On the way the disciple came to know how great was the yogic power of his guru from an incident that happened. The guru met a shawl merchant near Lahore and asked him to feed a large number of Sadhus nearly a thousand strong who had gathered there. But when the shawl merchant refused to feed them, the guru who wished to teach him a lesson cursed him and said that his godown would be consumed by fire. When the merchant reached home he found that his words were actually being fulfilled for a fire was raging in his godown. He then came running to the Sadhu and begged his pardon and entreated him to save him from disaster. Pity overcame Devadasji. He blessed the merchant and the fire was brought under control. Only one valuable shawl had been burnt and the rest were intact. After that incident the grateful merchant fed the Sadhus for seven days. The guru explained to his disciple that the merchant was in fact a pious person who had for a while fallen a victim to greed and it is in order to save him from pride that this incident was enacted so that there might be change in the outlook of the merchant. The disciple came to realise that even the wrath of the spiritual guide brings about beneficient results to the disciple.

On another occasion while he was travelling with his guru in Central India an incident happened which also set in strong relief to the people by the great yogic power of the guru. The Nawab of the place had laid a law that there should no blowing of the conches in his territory for it was tantamount to encouraging Hinduism and whoever broke the law was punished with instant death. The guru asked the disciple to keep away from him. He then entered the prohibited area and blew the conch.

When the soldiers came to arrest the conch blower they saw that there lay a trunk from which the head had been recently servered and that there were patches of blood. Later on the sound was repeated but the headless body vanished. When the Nawab came in person he saw a Sadhu sitting in meditation, he came to realize the folly of the order of prohibition and at the bidding of the Sadhu he cancelled his previous order against the blowing of conches. The Nawab not only conceded the Sadhu's demand but also built a Hindu temple on the spot.

Under the guidance of Devadasji the disciple practised severe austerity for several years. He used to practise meditation before the Dhuni in mid summer and on cold nights with no warm clothing at all round him. By the grace of the guru he stood the severe test and came out successful. At the command of his guru he set out to holy Dwaraka dham, although he was unwilling to undertake the pilgrimage. When he returned he found to his disappointment that the guru had expired during the interval. He became mad with sorrow, refused to take food and spent sleepless nights. On the seventh day the guru appeared before him in his illumined body, blessed him and pacified him. He also assured that whenever any necessity would arise the disciple would be able to see his guru. The guru assured him that he is still alive in subtle body although he shuffled off his mortal coil just as a snake throws off its slough.

On another occasion when Katiababa, for that was the new name Ramdas assumed, was deeply absorbed in meditation with the five fires (Panchdhuni, four on four sides, one in front, the sun overhead) around him. He was accustomed to severe austerity before the Dhuni in mid summer, cold winter night with practically bare body except a piece of heavy wood, three cubit feet long round the waist. It was the instruction of Devadasji to lead austere life as it would help driving away dullness and meditate on God. He stood the test. While practising austerity before Panchadhuni some Sadhu who was jealous of his reputation heaped round him a large quantity of dry cow-dung cakes in the burning fire so that he might be burnt to death. When the people of the village saw the raging fire they came and put it out ; to their surprise they saw the Sadhu seated in the centre absolutely unhurt. They were angry with the culprit ; when they wished to punish him Katiababa advised them to be calm for the guilty was sure to be punished. A few days later news came that the culprit was put in jail for a different crime. The episode however confirmed the general belief that the body of a real yogi is never burnt alive. Once when the yogi was going along the banks of the Jumna during the period of Sepoy mutiny a soldier took it to his head to fire shots at him. Every time he aimed at Katiababa the shot went out of the mark and this happened four times successively. The soldier then came to realize the uncommon psychic power of of the yogi and took his hat off to him as a mark of respect.

By the grace of God and the guru Babaji had attained success in yoga ; and in the course of time many disciples gathered around him. Garibdas who was a very pious Brahmin of Bharatpur was his first disciple. After completing his Paribrajaka period Katiababa decided to settle at Brindaban, for the place was steeped in the atmosphere of religion and rich in holy association. He fixed his seat under a banian tree on a bathing ghat near Ganga kunja and there he continued to stay with his disciples. One night the local people sent a beautiful young widow to tempt the Babaji ; the Babaji was about to pronounce curse on her but he restrained himself and sent her away with a severe warning that she should never tempt holy people. The kindness of Babaji was extended even to the worst criminals such as Gosaiya, the notorious decoit who had not given up a life of crime even after fourteen years of jail life. At times kindness may succeed where cruelty fails. Thus it was that while the Babaji was smoking Ganza with Chhanu singh who was one of the persons who used to gather round his Dhuni, he asked the notorious criminal Gosaiya to give up his life of crime and renounce all bad habits, turn a new life and become one of his disciples. Time is one of the greatest factors in life and when the time is ripe even the worst may turn a new leaf and make amends and try to lead a life of virtue. Such was in fact the effect of the miraculous touch on the life of this criminal. Although the Babaji converted one criminal he was in turn the victim of the evil that was practised on him by the others of the gang who had not yet been converted. Suspicious of his wealth some of them picked up a quarrel with him and threatened him. The Babaji in his anger cursed them and said that they would be arrested that very night. That in fact came to be true, they were arrested for some violent crime which they had committed earlier. When two of them were released on bail they came to Babaji and entreated his protection. He forgave them on condition that they would steal no longer. Later on after the trial they were released but the third who did not repent was convicted and sent to jail. The Babaji later on met him one day, he was hand cuffed and was working as a road mender. This time he begged Babaji's forgiveness and the kind hearted Babaji told him that he would be released within three days. The prisoner had lost his appeal and therefore the assurance that was offered him appeared as remote as a dream. But he was released miraculously on the appointed day and he remained grateful to the Babaji for the rest of his life.

On the occasion of the great Kumba Mela at Hardwar where thousands of Vaisnavas gather Babaji was publicly honoured as their accepted leader. This honour however brought with it great responsibility. Thus it happened that on one occasion he was returning in the company of his disciple Garibdas from Bharatpur to Brindaban, he was carrying with him two seers of Charas. As the carrying of such a large quantity of intoxicating leaf is prohibited by law both of them were arrested and brought before the court. When the Majestrate asked him what he would do with such a a large quantity Babaji replied that it would last him only two days. And in order to convince the Majestrate he swallowed in one dose half the entire quantity. The awe-struck Majestrate not only acquitted the Babaji but also exempted him from the provision of law so that he might not be arrested as on that occasion.

On his return to Brindaban Babaji shifted from the Ganga kunja to the Kulia Ashram in the Kemarban area where a large garden had been donated for his use. One of the peculiar traits of Babaji was that he was as fond of the Ashram cow as he was of the other inmates and he used to take the cow with him even to the distant Kumba Mela at Allahabad. On cold winter nights he would wrap the cow with his own blanket and pass the cold with bare body. Katiababa thus taught his disciples by example rather than by precept that even the lower animals are like ourselves and that they, too, feel like us heat and cold, pleasure and pain.

Although Babaji was very kind he would test his disciples by imposing very severe restraint almost amounting to cruelty upon his disciples, for it was essential, in his view, that their egoism should utterly be effaced. In this way he sought to maintain the ideal of Sanyas in all its pristine purity, so that before long his disciples might realize the ultimate Truth. One of his disciples, Premdas left him in anger unable to endure the test of severity only to return repentant before long a sadder and wiser man. That man had during the period of estrangement turned to study of anti-Vaisnavite literature. In consequence of it he became mad. At the entreaty of his other disciples Katiababa cured him by giving some Prasadam. Noticing how Premdas was specially prone to fits of irritation as a result of smoking excessive Ganza Babaji imposed upon him a vow of twelve years silence. As soon as this order was pronounced, the disciple lost his power of speech and he did not regain it for a period of twelve years even though he was bittten by a snake. At the end of that long period Babaji arranged for a grand feast in honour of the successful accomplishment of the Vrata (vow). From that time onwards the disciple came to be known as Mouniji.

It has already been stated that among the most noted of his disciples was the renowned lawyer Tara kishore Choudhury who later on came to be known as Santadas Babaji. This disciple was advised to meditate specially during the latter half of the night as it was favourable for spiritual realization. But owing to the force of habit as a result of his earlier way of life he was not in a position to carry out the instruction of his guru's injunction. One night when he was sleeping he heard an awful voice commanding him to get up and meditate and the same time a stone fell within the mosquito curtain wherein he was sleeping. From that time he never failed to meditate during the Brahma muhurta time in early dawn. On another occasion this disciple was suffering from acute fever. He thought that in as much as his guru used to smoke Ganza if he, too, should make an offering of Ganza and afterwards smoke it he might be cured. In fact that belief came to be literally fulfilled. Tara kishore's wife who was also a devotee of Babaji came to realize how the guru protected them from all kinds of difficulties including attacks from thieves and other wicked people.

Babaji's behaviour was at time's inexplicable from purely rational point of view. It thus came to pass that on a festive occasion after feeding a large number of Sadhus much food was left. At night when some Sadhus approached Babaji for food he drove them out mercilessly and refused to feed them although his disciples entreated him to be hospitable. Afterwards Babaji told his disciples that they were not real Sadhus but the real Sadhus were on their way and that they would come later in the night. In fact they arrived shortly afterwards and were treated very hospitably.

Another episode relates to a poor Brahmin who was suffering from acute asthma. Katiababa asked him to spend the rest of his life in the meditation of God for according to him a person who does not spend his time in the meditation of God but wastes his time in the persuit of sense pleasures, leads useless life and in this respect he is no better than a barren woman. But the person to whom this advice was given was so averse to a life of contemplation that the Babaji in apparent anger asked him to leave the Ashram at once. Katiababa used to say that a Sadhu has two sets of teeth like an elephant, the outer one for show and the inner one for use. That is to say one should not judge a Sadhu by his external behaviour. There was thus a double aspect in Katiababa. For all outside aspect he conducted himself as though he were a stingy householder worrying himself over profit and loss and occasionally exhibiting temper when it is unwanted. But behind all his fondness for Ganja and for idle gossips there lay a soft heart melting at the sufferings of the devotees and eager to succour them.

Indeed it was his excess of kindness that brought about the end of Babaji. Pushkardas, the greedy cook of the Ashram thought that Babaji had plenty of money with him and he wished to get it for himself by administering a dose of poison to the master. Although Babaji could have handed him over to the law as in fact the other immates of the Ashram desired that he should, yet he forgave the criminal not once but twice. It was a belief of Babaji that a man suffers for his Karma and that he is saved by the grace of God. The ungrateful cook however continued in his wicked ways and administered arsenic poison along with the food. On account of extreme old age Babaji suffered very much this time, his health was impaired and it was little consolation that the ungrateful cook was finally driven out.

One of the outstanding characteristics of Babaji was his universal benevolence. He treated the gate keeper of a prince with the same regard as he treated the prince himself who had specially invited the Babaji to grace his palace. That life of his where the light of the spirit and the shade of the world had woven such a chequered pattern was finally laid at rest when on 8th Magh in the year 1909 he attained Mahasamadhi.

SANTADAS BABAJI

Tara kishore Choudhury who was later on known as Santa das Babaji was born on Friday, 10th June, 1859, as the son of Har kishore Choudhury, the famous Brahmin zamindar of Bamai, a village in the Habiganj sub-division of the district of Sylhet. His mother Girija sundari Devi, too, was a highly accomplished and cultured lady. About the records of his early life two are known. One was the passing away of his mother when he was nine years old, depriving him of the affection of his mother at the tender age. The other was his marriage with Annada Devi, the daughter of Hari Charan Bhattacharya which took place after his passing the Matriculation examination. He then came to Calcutta for higher study. But he was attracted by the liberal views of Brahma samaj of which he became a member. His father was very much annoyed at this, but the son was equally adamant and was prepared to stake his all what he considered to be right. After passing his M.A. degree examination he was for some time engaged on the tutorial stuff of the City college. It was at tihs time that he went to Benares to see his ailing father. There he met Trailanga swami and Bhaskarananda swami. Contact with great persalities like them brought a change in his out look. Although he was engaged in the profession of law at first in his district town of Sylhet and later on at the High Court in Calcutta he spent all that he earned by his profession upon philanthropic activities. As time advanced his mind definitely took a religious bent. He was inquest of a guide who could lead his life towards its destined goal. He was, it may be stated here, accustomed to take bath in the

Ganges every day. One day when he was proceeding towards the Ganges in a mood of depression, he saw a luminous figure appear before him. That figure invited him, uttered a few mystic words and assured him that he would find before long a true spiritual guide. And before long what transpired in that prophetic vision came to be fulfilled; for he was received graciously by Katiababa, a famous Vaisnava and a realized soul who lived at that time at Brindaban.

As far as his worldly respects were concerned he was still handling law suits and he had a large clientele because of his keen intellect and his winning ways. He was equally popular with the judges and with the other learned brothers of the profession. All the money which he earned by his profession he spent in worthy ways on poor students and on his relations and dependants. His wife too was an equally pious woman and she looked after the dependants with great care. But inspite of these multifarious activities the main urge of life which was the quest after spiritual values was never forgotten. He used to meditate regularly and spend some time in the worship of the family deity. They came to realize that God is the real owner of all they possessed and that they ought to regard themselves as the trustees of the property which they administered. It was their duty to discharge their trust as efficient agents.

On seeing the pitiable condition of the Ashram of Katiababa at Brindaban he built the Ashram and spent large sums of money upon it. After re-equipping the Ashram with all things that were essential he had the images of Radha and Krishna installed there some time in the year 1897. He wished to renounce his secular life once for all, but his guru urged him that the time was not yet ripe, that he had much to do in the world and as for spiritual future it was quite safe and assured. After having tested his disciple many times in order to know of what stuff was that he was made and after finding out how far he was really intent upon spiritual acquisition the guru came to realize how sincere the disciple was and he in his turn saved the disciple from many trials and tribulations and even from death itself. On a pilgrimage round the Braja mandal they met on a certain occasion a large number of tender boys near the village of Nandagram. Tara kishore Choudhury who would meet the expense of the Ashram wished to distribute sweets among them. At that time two very beautiful boys suddenly appeared before them and said that they themselves would distribute the sweets to others. The distribution was over immediately thereafter the two boys also disappeared no body knew whereto they had gone. On another occasion after feeding the Sadhus and his guru he was resting for a while, for he was very much tired and had been fasting for the whole day. Suddenly a boy appeared before him and offerred him a cup of milk and after handing it over to him disappeared in the twinkling of an eye.

After the work of the reconstruction of the Ashram was over Tara kishore Choudhury wished to retire. The guru could not see the final touches given to the Ashram for he had passed away by that time. It is now the time for the fulfillment of the guru's assurance that the secular ties of the disciple would be cut asunder. By 1915 he decided to give up every thing, legal practice, friends and the secular life alike ; he entered the Ashram. The name of this Ashram in Brindaban was Nimbark Ashram. Here he continued to lead a life of humility and of prayer while continuing to discharge his spiritual duties such as the worship of the deity as instructed by the guru. One night the ornaments put on the deity were stolen, this incident troubled his mind very much. Thereafter he resolved that he would keep awake at night and spend his time in prayer. In this way he gained serenity of mind and attained new heights of spiritual perfection. Incidently this made him forget his past life and all that it stood for. Thus it happened that when one day some gentlemen came to Nimbark Ashram and asked him about Tara kishore Babu he quietly replied that he was dead. The influential lawyer of Calcutta was dead; out of that personality a new being had emerged and that was Santa das Babaji.

In the new environment also there was much that had to be achieved, much that had to be set right. The Ashram affairs had been neglected. After the passing away of Katia Baba, Vishnudasji was in charge of the Ashram. He was a young man and he did not know how to manage the affairs of the Ashram properly. The leadership of the Vaisnavas was a post of great honour, it involved a great responsibility, because during the Braja mandal pilgrimage thousands of Vaisnava pilgrims used to come to the Nimbark Ashram and were fed and were looked after. The assembled Vaisnavas requested unanimously that Santa das Babaji should be their head, for undoubtedly he was pre-eminent in his spiritual attainments.

From the time of Kumba fair held in 1920 at Nasik Santa das Babaji was the recognised head of the Nimbark Ashram. All other Vaisnava sects, such as the Sri sect, the Vishnuswamy sect and the Madhwa sect also recognised his pre-eminence. As the head of the order it developed upon him to look after a large number of pilgrims and to attend personally to the affairs of the Ashram. But so deep was his faith in God and in the guru that the Ashram work went on smoothly and the many pilgrims who came there were fed with Prasadam, although he himself never went out for collection of money on behalf of the Ashram. He used to say that from the dawn of the world God has sustained the world and that God manifests Himself as the guru for the instruction of the world. The more the disciple is able to wipe out his egoism the greater is the glory of God and the guru as manifested through him.

In the fulness of time many disciples gathered round him. He used to take great care in shaping the welfare of the disciples. He looked after their spiritual as well as their physical well being ; at times he used to be strict and at times linient depending upon the exigencies of the circumstances. But all had their share of attention and no one was neglected. Even the sweeper of the Ashram had his share of attention of the master. In his capacity as the spiritual head he also edited a number of Vaisnava works. Among the sacred books which he edited in order to preach the glory of God, special mention may be made of the Brahmavidya, the Darsanik Vijanam and the Brahmavadi Rishi, all of which are well known works and which bring out the depth of his intellectual outlook. In the main he supported the Nimbark point of view.

In the fulness of his spiritual attainment he revisited Calcutta and Sylhet along with his disciples in order to bless his household disciples in those places and it is needless to say that their joy knew no bounds. As the years advanced he withdrew himself more and more from all external activities and he devoted most of his time to the contemplation of God. It was in this way that he prepared himself for the last chapter of his life. He left for Brindaban and there, on 22nd Kartik, 1935 in that sacred land he attained Mahasamadhi.

LALA BABU

Ganga govinda Sinha was a respectable gentleman of Kandi, Murshidabad District. Working efficiently as the favourite Dewan of Bengal, Behar and Orissa during the period of Warren Hastings, the Governor General of India he earned a big Zamindari. His brother Radha govinda Sinha, too, acquired vast property but he died without an heir, so he made a gift of his property to Pran krishna Sinha, the son of Ganga gobinda Sinha. Krishna govinda Sinha allias Lala Babu, the hero of our story, was the son of Pran krishna Sinha and the grandson of Ganga govinda Sinha. He was born about 1775 and the favourite heir of his father and grandfather who, out of endearment, called him Lala. Love of truth, devotion to God, kindness and spirit of service, the dominant characteristics of his life were noticed in him from boyhood, his heart always melt for the suffering of the poor. With the growth of age he, by dint of merit, learnt not only Sanskrit and Bengali but also English, Persian and Arabic with the help of efficient teachers. Sanskrit scripture specially Bhagavat was his favourite subject.

An incident at this time turned the course of his life and made the favourite heir conscious about his position. One poor Brahmin tried several times in vain to meet his father Pran krishna Sinha for some monetary help for the marriage of his daughter, each time the portor turned him out. One day accidently when Krishna govinda Sinha could know the miserable condition of the Brahmin he asked the cashier to pay the poor Brahmin one thousand rupees but the cashier had no right to pay any thing to any body without the permission of Pran krishna Sinha, the head of the family and father of Krishna govinda Sinha. The cashier immediately reported the matter to the proper authority who, in order to keep the prestige of his son, ordered the cashier to pay the said amount to the poor Brahmin but at the same time warned his son through the cashier to evade similar happenings in future. This caused a rude shock in the mind of the son who realised that as the heir of a multimillionaire he had no right to spend a pie from the estate even for a right cause. He decided to stand on his legs and earn; he was determined not to accept even a pie from the estate. He left the palace, the tears of his mother and the request of his father could not persuade him to desist from his determination.

He came to Burdwan and began his life as a Sheristadar in the Collectorate. By this time he was married with a beautiful girl named Katyayani who in due time presented to her husband a beautiful son named Narayan chandra Sinha. When Orissa was annexed to the Government Krishna govinda Sinha was appointed as the chief settlement officer but afterwards he, because of his efficiency, was raised to the post of the chief Dewan. During the time he became acquainted with the King of Orissa. It so happened that one officer in charge of the government posted at Puri put the temple estate to auction for arrears of rent. As soon as Krishna govinda Sinha came to know about the plight of temple deity he cancelled the auction at his own risk. By this deed of generosity he earned the sincerest regard of the King of Orissa who, out of gratitude, gave him some portion of his zamindari. It is said that the Nim wood is brought from this estate to Puri for changing the body of the deities (Jagannath, Subhadra and Balabhadra) after every twelve years.

During this time Krishna govinda Sinha went on a pilgrimage to Brindaban. The spiritual atmosphere of the holy place, the renunciation of the world by the Vaisnava saints for exclusive practice of devotion and meditation on God charmed him very much. He wanted to live there permanently but the duty to the world did not allow him to fulfill his desire. He returned to Orissa, his place of activity. By this time he got the terrible death news of his father who repented very much for his previous harsh treatment towards his dear son and wanted to see him at least once before death but could not persuade him to return home. Krishna govinda Sinha, too, repented very much for not fulfilling his father's last wish. After finishing the Sradh ceremony of his father he left Orissa and lived in Calcutta and sometimes at Kandi in Murshidabad and was looking after the estate.

During this time an incident changed the course of his life. While returning in a palanquin to the palace at Kandi from his Kutchery (office) through a village he heard one evening the voice of a washerman girl. She said to her father 'Oh father, the day is gone, when you will set fire to Vasana (a village term for furnace meant for preparation of cheap washing soap)'. The voice seemed to be a warning to Krishna govinada Sinha who realised that the oil in his life-lamp was almost exhausted;

it was high time for him to set fire to desire by the practice of indifference to the transitory world which brings misery only and blocks the gateway of Truth. The conscience-prick was so deep in him that all charms of the world disappeared from him. The words of the washerman girl acted as the miracle. He took it to be a call from the High. Leaving the vast estate, beautiful wife and dear son he came to Brindaban, his favourite place and passed his days in servere austerity, meditation of God and lived on Madhukari. Hearing about his life of austerity there his manager rushed from Murshidabad to Brindaban and persuaded him to accept at least twenty five lakhs of rupees from his own earned Orissa Zamindari for building a temple of his chosen deity, worship of the said deity, repairs of other dilapidated temples and bathing ghats at the holy place, opening alms house for the Vaisnava devotees and also for the poor. Thus his charitable activities spread his reputation throughout in the north where he was popularly known as Lala Babu. Charity brings not only friends but enemies too, there was some rich man at Brindaban who became his rival in charitable activities. People talked more of Lala Babu than of him who consequently became zealous of the noble devotee.

During the time of building a temple for Srikrishna, his chosen deity at Brindaban Lala Babu had to go frequently for stones to Bharatpur in Rajputna, and used to live with the king of Bharatpur, who was his personal friend and for this friendship he had to face a great danger. By this time the Government, under the supervision of Sir Charles Metcalf, the then resident of the government at Delhi, was concluding a treaty with the different kings of Rajputna. The king of Bharatpur was one of the signatories in the treaty. For some reason or other he refused to sign the treaty. Suspecting the hand of Lala Babu in the refusal the district Magistrate at Muttra, under order of the superior authorities at Delhi, arrested him and sent him to Delhi. Thousands of people followed him. On enquiry Metcalf found him innocent and ordered his release. Charmed with the personality and indiffirence of Lala Babu Metcalf recommended to the authorities at Delhi to confer on him a title which he gladly refused.

Returning at Brindaban he lived very humbly and prayed to God to grant him a vision. While watching one day in severe winter the worship of the deity in the temple built by him he thought if the image of God is living his body must have heat. To test it he asked the priest to put the lump of butter on the head of the image, which, to the wonder of the priest and the persons present on the spot was found melting away in heat. He also asked the priest to put cotton piece before the nostril of the image to test life in the same. In this way he verified his belief in God who manifests through image.

One day his chosen deity asked him in dream to leave Brindaban immediately, and go to Goverdhan and remain merged in meditation of God. He came there and began severe austerity living on Madhukari (by begging morsel of food from door to door). The more he meditated the more he felt that he should get initiation from a realised soul as that is the most genuine passport for the domain of spirituality. Accordingly he approached Krishnadas Babaji, a humble devout Vaisnava saint and entreated him to initiate him and lead him from darkness to light. The said Babaji could read the mind of others by the mere look, asked him to go back as time for his initiation was not yet ripe, when time would be ripe he would go personally to him to give that. This refusal disappointed him, tears rolled on from his eyes, he felt that all his charity was useless, he purchased name and fame with it but the real wealth which is love of God, purity, by which he could cross the ocean of Sansara was not attained; the treasure of spirituality for life's safe journey was empty, charity was not sufficient to raise him above worldliness.

He continued his austerity as before, with his cloth dirty, hairs shaved, body emaciated, this austerity made him humbler than before. After some months he again approached the saintly man and was refused again on the same ground. The refusal for the second time made him realise that in his endeavour there might remain some leakage through which all fruits of his meritorious actions oozed out just as a few drops of urine spoil the entire quantity of milk in the pot where they fall. Though he was vexed with himself he continued his routine life as before.

One day while going out for Madhukari through the street he saw the palatial building of a multi millionaire. Immediately he felt that he found the solution of life, the idea flashed before him all on a sudden that he had been a competitor with the owner of this palatial building in the so-called service of the Vaisnavas and in charity, this competition aroused in him ego consciousness and made his mind impure, it did not allow him to proceed in the path of spirituality, his subtle desire for name and fame stood on his way to receive the grace of Krishnadas Babaji; the sense of rivalry in him was on the wane now due to continued austerity and meditation on God. In order to wipe out ego consciousness he appeared before the gate of the multi millionaire at this auspicious moment of his life and bawled out 'glory into Radha and Krishna'. This very utterance attracted the family members including the multimillionaire who came out immediately to see the real Vaisnava. The multi millionaire warmly greeted him and then said with folded hands in emotion 'I acknowledge my defeat, though you were my competitor and rival in charitable works you have attained victory, the begging bowl on your shoulder is full of glory whereas I purchased defeat with gold. I congratulate you, you are blessed, I offer my entire estate to you, please bless me. Lala Babu refused the offer with thanks. Returning after this to his place he found to his surprise that Krishna das Babaji was waiting for him at his door and said 'all tests are over, time is ripe now for your initiation, the last phase of egoism in you is gone, sing the glory of God, take bath and get ready for initiation.'

It was in this way that Krishnadas Babaji graced him. The field was ready. The seed of the real love of God, sown thus in the fertile field of his heart, nurtured by devotion, purity, sincerity, egolessness and the grace of a realised guru began to fructify in the realisation of God. The zamindar of Kandi was now a humble Vaisnava who wanted nothing but God. He got what he wanted. The people of Brindaban still speak of him who was widely known as Lala Babu. For the above interesting incident his reputation spread far and wide and people gathered round him every day. Tired of the crowd he left the place one dark night without informing any body. By this time some soldiers were coming from Gwalior and passing that away on horse back. He was trampled under foot by them and was wounded. The wound was severe and showed no sign of recovery. Then he was brought to Brindaban where he merged in the lap of his Ista.

SARVANANDA

Basudev Bhattacharya was a pious Brahmin of the village of Purvasthali in the district of Burdwan, Bengal. He was a Sakta and every night he used to worship the Mother of the Universe with great devotion. One night he had a vision in which he was commanded that he should proceed to Mehar near Chandpur in the district of Tiperah and there complete his Sadhana. In obedience to this behest he settled at the said place with his family. He had a faithful servant named Purnananda. The local zamidar Jatadhar who was the chieftain of the place accepted him as his guru and gave him some landed property and in this way he was immersed in Sakti worship. After spending some years in the performance of Tantric rites he proceeded with his faithful servant to the holy place of Kamakya to practise Sakti Sadhana. After many years of such Sakti Sadhana he heard a voice say that he would attain final liberation in his next life when he would be reborn as his own grandson. He was also told that he would in that life revive the Saktipith which lay at Mehar from the time of the sage Matanga who once worshipped Sakti and Siva at that place. After some time Basudev Bhattacharya died at Kamakya but his servant Purnananda returned to Mehar carrying with him the Bijakshara or the mystic word which was encased in a copper amulet and guarded with great care.

The date of the birth of Sarvananda is not known. Some are of the view that he might have lived at some time during the latter part of the fourteenth and the early part of the fifteenth century. According to Sir John Woodrof he practised

Sadhana and attained Siddhi on Sakranti or last day in the month of Poush, 1426. Fortunately it was Amavasya which is considered to be very auspicious for practising Tantric rites. According to Sarvananda Tarangini written by Sivanath, the son of Sarvananda it is said that Sarvananda pratised Sakti Sadhana during seven of his previous lives and at seven different places such as Nilachal,' Vindyagiri, Sindhu Saila, Badarikasram, Gangasagar, Benaras and Kamakya before he realised the Universal Mother in his last life as Sarvananda.

As a young man Sarvananda was very beautiful but beauty alone does not count much in society. Although he was born in a very learned, aristrocratic and pious Brahmin family learning did not come to him as part of his heredity. It looked as though that Mother Saraswati had been unkind to him. One day when he was present in an assembly of the learned, the Zamindar asked him almost casually if he knew what Tithi it was and he answered at once that it was Purnima, though everybody knew that it was Amavasya. In this way the derision of the assembled fell upon him and he left the place for good. When Sarvananda returned home Ballava devi, his beautiful wife scolded him for his lack of learning and that was more than he could bear. He wished to become learned by the grace of the Mother, as is said of Kalidas, the great poet. He climbed a palm tree in order to collect leaves which in those days were used as a substitute for paper. When he was up the tree gathering the precious palm leaves he saw a poisonous snake. In that extreme dilemma he caught hold of its neck and began to rub its face against the hard palm leaves. Finally he threw down the carcase of the snake and climbed down. To his surprise he found a Sanyasin waiting for him at the foot of the tree and wanted to grant him some boon. Sarvananda narrated his sad incident and wanted to avenge the zamindar by displaying his learning before him. The Sanyasin wanted to grant him some thing more i.e. attainment of the grace of the Mother. In order to convince him of his power he revived the snake which was then allowed to go in its own way. The Sanyasin then took him to the neighbouring Dakatia river and asked him to take his bath in it. After this he gave him spiritual instruction and initiated him into the mystery of religion. He also told that the only person who knew the technique of Sadhana was Purnananda. The Sanyasin then vanished from his sight and Sarvananda started in quest of Purnananda.

The sudden disappearance of the careless young man caused a stir in the family. The aged servant Purnananda who had grown with the family was also worried about it. But he remembered the copper amulet entrusted to his care by his former master and that reminded him of the part that he has to play. Purnananda knew the part which this despised decendant of his departed master was to play and he set out in quest of him in the deep forest. When the two recognised the mission which had brought them together Purnananda narrated the story of the copper amulet.

The time and the place were alike auspicious; for that was the very place where the sage Matanga had worshipped Siva and Sakti and had attained the vision of the Absolute. And so it happened that Purnananda procured for him the various ingredients of worship according to Tantric rites. The only ingredient lacking was the corpse of one who had recently died and that corpse was to serve as the seat of the Sadhaka. The aged Purnananda was willing to undergo the great sacrifice so that he might, in a way, become blessed by offering his body for a great cause. After much persuasion Sarvananda accepted the great sacrifice and Purnananda gave up his spirit by self strangulation. Before his passing away he warned Sarvananda that he should neither be swayed by fear nor be persuaded by temptation and above all he should not seek any boon from the Mother other than the vision of the Beautific.

The stage was thus set for the great sacrifice. Sarvananda sat on the body of Purnananda and plunged into the meditation of the Mother. Horrible form of ghosts emerged from the dark, a storm lashed the scene striking terror in the heart and yet Sarvananda continued his meditation. The scene then changed ; various temptations were thrown before him in the form of semi divine beings such as the Apsaras and the Kinnaries but all that went in vain. He remained absorbed in meditation. It seemed that night changed into dawn ; the melody of birds, voices harbingered the coming of the day and yet Sarvananda was solely intent upon the Supreme realisation. The dead body showed signs of animation but he would not resile from his supreme purpose. At last the Mother appeared before Sarvananda ; he prostrated before Her and sought Her blessing. By the grace of the Mother Purnananda was revived. As the fact that Servananda was insulted in the assembly of the learned was still rankling at his heart. Mother offered to show Her grace on the family and retrieve the honour of the family. It thus came to pass that dark Amavasya night suddenly turned into bright Purnima night to the great astonishment of the people of Mehar in general and of its zamindar Jatadhar in particular.

Sarvananda thus came to be recongnized as a Siddha purush and as a man of vast learning. Fame sought him ; and repentent Jatadhar offered him a valuable shawl but the kind hearted Tantric soul, on his way home, offered it to one prostitute who asked for it. Later on when Jatadhar who came to know about it asked him what he did with the shawl Sarvananda at an unguarded moment said that it was lying with his wife Ballava devi at home. Even that came to pass. When his nephew Sarananda was sent home to bring it from his unt, Ballava devi was not at home but a bright hand threw an identical shawl in the hand of Sarananda thus rescuing Her devotee from uttering falsehood.

After some time Sarvananda left Mehar and proceeded to Benares. His only attendant was the faithful Purnananda. On his way to Benares Sarvananda stayed for a while at Jessore as the guest of the learned Agambagis in order to study Tantric Sastras. At that time a learned pundit appeared at the court of the Raja of Jessore and invited the court pundits to an intellectual combat. Agambagis was too old to participate in it and he requested Sarvananda to take his place. When the challenger came to know in a dream that he was pitted against a Siddha purusha he thought better and left the place. A new trial then awaited Sarvananda. Agambagis claimed to be his guru, demanded his Gurudakshina which was nothing short of the demand that he should become his son-in-law by accepting his daughter in marriage. As Agambagis had no other option Sarvananda accepted the offer, stayed for a while with the guru, wrote a number of works and became the father of a number of children. His descendents are even now found in various parts of Jessore and Kalna. He was now free to set out for Benares. Although the pundits of Benares could not approve his Tantric mode of workship they left him alone because he was a great yogi and they did not like to invite trouble. In his later life Sarvananda came to be known as Avadhut Maharaj. The rest of his life remains a mystery although it is recorded that some had seen him and conversed with him in later years.

RAJA RAMKRISHNA

In the second half of the eighteenth century the political horizon of Bengal was overcast with anxiety, suspicion and fear. In spite of all that the palace of Natore in Rajshahi district was a busy scene of festivity and rejoicing. The occasion for it was that Rani Bhavani who was without children was adopting a young boy so that her estate might be properly administered and the family line continued. She was to choose from the assembled Brahmin boys one who had specially auspicious signs. Herself a pious Brahmin widow she was well known for piety, and broad outlook. Her charity knew no bounds. She made gifts of three hundred and sixty five fine houses to the same number of pious Brahmins at Benares. Her keen intellegence and foresight deserve praise from all. Bribed by foreigners before the battle of Plassy when Mirzafar, Jagatshet and other traitors were conspiring with the foreign representative Lord Clive to dethrone Sirajuddulla, the young Nawab of Bengal she condemned outright the heinous act and sounded a note of warning which, she remarked, if unheeded, would bring ruin to the whole country. and the future generations who would bear its terrible consequences would curse the conspirators for this act of folly. History has corroborated it fully.

Among the boys who were assembled on the festivity one of them specially impressed Dayaram, the Dewan of the estate by his upright bearing and dignified conduct. The Dewan thought that he was the boy born to be the king and himself escorted the boy to the queen's presence. The queen too was impressed with the boy and had selected him of all the boys for the adoption. That was the reason for the general rejoicing.

The Maharani wished that she would save her estate from despoilation by the Nawab who was thirsting whimsically to distribute it among the rank and file of his followers. The Maharani personally trained the boy so that he might be a good administrator, it was her pious wish that when the care of the estate devolved upon her adopted son she should be free to proceed to Benares in order to lead a holy life. It was with that end in view that she had, him married early to a beautiful and accomplished a young girl.

Thus it was that Ramkrishna, the youngest son of Harihar Roy of Atgram in the district of Rajshahi found him elevated to the throne of Natore royal family to whom they were closely related. The universal Mother held before him a far higher ideal, and he came to regard all that power and position could confer upon him to be in the nature of obstacles in path of spiritual realisation. One who is born to realise the Absolute does not wish to be bound even though it be fetters of gold. He spent long hours in the meditation of Mother Kali. He created a Panchamundi Asana and it is said that he practised Sava Sadhana according to Tantric rites. He also dedicated a big zamindari for the worship of the Mother in Her aspect of Aparna debi or Bhavani devi at Bhavanipur pith, a famous Pith according to Sakta Agama.

On a dark new moon night when he was meditating on the

Mother according to the technique of Sakti Sadhana there appeared before him a Sanyasin who accused him of being yet bound by worldly ties and suddenly vanished from his sight. Henceforth the call of the other world became stronger than ever and he sacrificed all else for the sake of it. The then government snatched away from him a portion of his estate by unfair means. He lost a big portion of his estate by the treachery of a friend whom he had helped in distress. Unperturbed by all such secular losses he persevered after the quest spiritual. He was so kind that he could not deny any one who sought help from him. He saved on one occasion a poor Brahmin who was about to commit suicide for he had become desperate on account of his poverty. It was then that the very Sanyasin who had formerly warned him sent a code message. A parallel instance is also reported in the life of the great Vaisnava saint Sanatan for he, too, was rescued from a life of secularism by a code message.

Be that as it may the exclusive preoccupation of Raja Ramkrishna with the problem of spiritual liberation produced disastrous results in the zamindari. In order to save the zamindari from complete bankruptcy the aged Rani came from Benares. Although she advised Ramkrishna to pay more attention to his worldly affairs all that advice went in vain. When he was practising meditation on the Panchamundi Asana at Bhavanipur pith he had once a vision of the universal Mother. It was a festive occasion. Thousands of devotess and admirers, men and women had gathered ; and as usual on such occasion a gang of burglars also came there in quest of booty. It was then that the universal Mother appeared in Her terrible aspect protected the temple and drove out the burglars. From that time onward they became converted men and friends of the royal Sadhu. Ramkrishna for his part spent most of his time in the meditation of the Mother. One day as befitting his status when he was having an elephant ride the mysterious Sadhu appeared before him once again. The Raja alighted from the elephant and accosted him. The Sadhu was none other than Sriji, a descendant of the royal family of Bundi. He had left home long ago and by the grace of God had become a Mahayogi. When he put his hand on the back of Ramkrishna he felt as though an electric shock passed through him ; and in an instant he remembered his previous life. Sriji and he were fellow disciples of a great guru and they had taken birth in order to accomplish what remained to be fulfilled in the quest after perfection. Their past lives and their Tapasya for a common cause in a cave at Hardwar swam before his vision. Sriji had accomplished his purpose and had now come to help his brother disciple. After having imparted this information he vanished from his sight.

Concious of the part that he was called upon to play Ramkrishna now redoubled his effort. He took leave of his wife, entrusted his minor children to her care and withdrew from all worldly activity. He devoted himself wholeheartedly to the realisation of the Mother. Although he had previously occasional visions of the Mother he was now determined to have Her in his. heart at all times. There was however one difficulty, he had to obtain the pardon of his foster mother the Maharani Rani Bhavani who was his guide and whose hopes he had grieviously disappointed. It is that by his power of yoga he appeared before the Maharani although he was physically seated in his Panchamundi Asana. The much desired pardon was readily obtained, for the Maharani was herself of a pious desposition. When all his anxiety on that account was removed he obtained the beautific vision of the Mother as he was meditating on the bank of the Ganges. In the fulness of time in the year 1795 A. D. the great yogi merged in the Absolute.

VAMAKSHEPA

From a very long time the Siddhapith or Tarapith as it is called had been a great centre of spiritual influence. It is situated in the district of Birbhum which gave birth to Chandidas, Joydeva and Nityananda among the Vaishnava saints as well as the noted Saktas such as Anandanath, Kailaspati and Mokshananda. The adherents of both cults have maintained the spiritual currents of the place through ages. Here it was that Vamakshepa, the great Trantik was born on 12th Falgun, 1837 at the village of Atla near Tarapith, of a poor Brahmin family. His father Sarvananda Chatterjee was an ordinary householder who was known for his piety, purity and simplicity. His mother Rajkumari was equally a pious lady. Vamakshepa was the second son. As he was not at all interested in the physical well being and was totally devoid of all traces of worldiness, the people called him mad. He had a peculiar delight, he used to remove the family idols of his neighbours at night to some distant place on river bank and worshipped them to his heart's content and for this he would get severe scolding from them. It is said that he had a special delight in playing on straw heap at the outskirts of the village ; once it caught fire and he very narrowly burnt himself. On account of the financial difficulties of his parents he did not proceed beyond the stage of primary education. In order to get rid of the financial difficulties his father who was a good singer and an expert violin player started a 'Jatra (theatrical) party with the help of boys and neighbours but he could not improve his condition by this. His mother who was a pious woman made him acquainted with the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. He found joy in songs of gods and goddesses and became acquainted with devotional scriptures. His widow sister was a pious lady and it was she who was an instrument in developing the religious sentiment in the mind of her brother from boyhood. When Vamakshepa was young his father passed away.

It was at that stage that he came under the influence of Kailaspati Baba, the well known Tantric Sadhaka of the Tarapith. He used to visit Durgadas Sarker who was an officer under the Maharaja of Natore and who was entrusted with the responsibility for the proper conduct of the worship in the temple at Siddhapith. As Rajkumari, the mother of Vamakshepa found it difficult to run the home she sent her two sons to be brought up by their uncle. He merely appointed the boys to look after the cows and did not spend any money upon their education. As Vamacharan was found unfit even for this simple task he was speedily despatched home. It was obious that he was not meant to make any mark in the world. His special aptitude led him to worship the Mother Tara with flowers and Bilwa leaves which he collected with great devotion from distant places. When he offered them before the Mother with word 'Ma-Tara' he forgot his identity. His very existence seemed to be for the realisation of the Mother alone. Worship of the Mother was his only interest in life and nothing else. He was encouraged in his chosen path by the love and affection of Kailaspati Baba and Mokshananda. He wished to find himself in the lap of the Universal Mother. His mother thought that he was mad and had him locked up ; but his devotion to the Mother continued steady like the flow of oil in the lamp. The Sadhana that he had practised in his previous births was bearing fruits now. He broke all bonds with the world, swam accross the river Dwaraka and reached the holy Tarapith. When he reached the cottage of Kailaspati Baba he found the place quite suitable for his purpose. Kailaspati Baba who was himself a realised soul welcomed the eager aspirant, blessed him and took him as his disciple. When his mother came to know what had happened she went to Tarapith to bring her son back. But Kailaspati Baba consoled her and said that her son would be very well looked after and that what had happened was by the will of the Universal Mother. By divine grace some arrangement was made to look after the needs of the family. By the grace of the Mother some kind of material help was forthcoming. That help came through agency of Durga charan Sarkar who was the agent of the Maharaja of Natore. Vamacharan was taken into the temple service and the task that was given to him was that of collecting flowers for the Divine service. But he was not meant for work and therefore even here he proved to be a total failure. He remained absorbed in the thought of the Mother and he cared not for heat or cold, sun or shower.

Although Vamacharan had cut off practically all connection with his home his regard for his mother did not diminish. When he came to know that his mother had passed away and that her body could not be brought to Tarapith for cremation on account of the swollen river he swam across the river, took possesion of the body of his mother from his relations and swam back with it. He then asked his brother Ramcharan to perform the funeral rites. On the Sradh day he wished to give a grand feast but it was far beyond the means of his brother. But on the appointed day all kinds of delicious dishes were prepared and served, for help came in profusion from quarters known and unknown. When the invited guests were being fed the dark clouds appeared in the sky and there was heavy down pour of rain. ; but thanks to the grace of Mother Tara, not a drop fell in the place where the feeding was going on, although the neighbouring streets were all flooded.

After having finished his duty towards his mother Vamacharan plunged once again into the worship of the Mother, he practised Tantric rites according to the Sastras. Both Kailaspati Baba and Mokshananda helped him in every possible manner; and under the guidance of these able masters the disciple made rapid progress. It looked as though Mother Tara, the universal Spirit had taken Her abode in him. In the course of his Sadhana a number of temptations came which he resisted successfully. Once a young and beautiful Bhairavi came to Tarapith and tempted him by offering to become his Bhairavi. Vamakshepa threatened to kill her with his Chimta (iron instrument used by Sadhus for self protection) and the frightened Bhairavi fell at his feet and begged his pardon. On another occasion the officer in charge of the Tarapith temple engaged a public woman in order to tempt him. When she approached Vamakshepa with evil intention she found no male sign in him. When he cried aloud to the Mother the public woman fell unconscious and blood began to flow from her mouth. When she regained consciousness and begged his pardon he graciously forgave her and from that time onward she became a changed woman.

The spiritual guides of Vamacharan realised that the disciple had attained perfection and that henceforth he was fit to be installed as the head of the Siddhapith. Kailaspati Baba took leave of him and moved away as a free bird. Mokshadananda too left the place. The responsibility of maintaining the spiritual atmosphere of the place fell upon Vamakshepa. Upon him fell the responsibility of spreading the glory of the Pith which are said to have been sanctified by Vasistha, Bhrigu, Dattatreya, and Durvasa. Vamakshepa did not follow any code of external discipline for he was above the reach of ordinary Acharas. He would at times partake his food with street dogs or apparently desecrate the temple by answering the call of Nature within the sanctified precints. The temple servants endured it all for some time for they had strict orders that they should not cross the will of Vamakshepa. It is true that he was absorbed day and night in the thought of the Mother and that to him the question of purity and impurity did not arise. But human nature being what it is they could not tolerate what they considered to be the wanton desecration of the holy place and they stopped his supply of food. One day the Maharani of Natore had a strange dream. The Goddess appeared in dream and declared that she (Maharani) was denying food offerings which were made to Her in an much as one of Her sons Vamakshepa was being denied food. After that Vamakshepa was allowed to have his way. In the course of time his yogic power began to manifest itself and people came to him from various quarters and for diverse objects. Some wished to be cured of the ills of flesh ; and others in quest of spiritual upliftment.

Vamakshepa served them to the measure of his ability and according to their needs. Many a woman felt blessed for the speedy recovery of their dying sons, daughters and husbands by the grace of the Mother through him.

On one occasion a lawyer brought a suit against one of the employees of temple for misappropriating public fund. Although he was found guilty he was forgiven and reinstated in service upon Vamakshepa pleading for him. Dr. Hari charan Banerjee of Rampurhat was on his way home walking in the heat of the midday sun as his daughter was suffering from Diptheria. Vamakshepa asked him to rest for a while ; and when he reached home he came to know that his daughter had already passed away. It was obvious that the saint of the Tarapith knew by his psychic power what had already happened. Once a dying man came to the Tarapith asking for some Prasad. He could hardly take it for he was gasping for breath ; when Vamakshepa took pity on him and served him he recovered from his sickness and returned home a healthy man. There was a man who belonged to the untouchable caste and he was a leper. He used to bring food for Vamakshepa and he used to accept it. As Nanda Handi for such was his name, used to suffer terribly Vamakshepa took pity on him, asked him to pray to God and gave him some mud from the temple to be rubbed on his sores and by a miracle within a month he became a completely changed man physically and spiritually.

There was a person called Nimai who was suffering from hernia for a long time. He was a native of Belagram and as he found it difficult to maintain his family on account of his ill health he resolved to commit suicide. On a dark night he approached Tarapith, rope in hand to hang himself. Just then he heard a terrible voice. It was the voice of Vamakshepa calling upon the Mother Tara. That upset all his plans; but he continued to stay near the temple and lived by begging from the pilgrims. One day Nimai wished to smoke Ganja and he took some fire from the Dhuni of Vamakshapa. This enraged the saint and he kicked the hernia patient in the lower part of his abdomen. Although he fell down unconscious he got up cured of his hernia and he returned home to serve his wife and children. On another occasion a phthisis patient was brought before him. As he was very weak and almost at the point of death he was carried in a cot and brought in the presence of the saint. At first Vamakshapa was very angry. He caught him by the neck and almost throttled him and asked him whether he would commit any more sin. Strangely enough the patient sat up, asked for food and after taking it he returned home a healthier and wiser man. But every one who approached him was not as lucky as these two. A certain young man thought that by the grace of Vamakshepa he could gain the first prize in the Derby race. He fared so ill that he ran away in fright. A certain rich man who was a zamindar came to Vamakshepa and while apparently engaged in meditation his mind wandered and he was thinking of purchasing a fine pair of shoes. Vamakshepa warned him not to think of shoes while he was meditating. On a different occasion a number of educated men came to see Vamakshepa and were astonished to see him sharing his food with some dogs. When they remonstrated against this Vamakshepa touched them and to their horror they found that Vamakshepa and the dogs assumed fine human shape whereas they themselves had been metamorphosed into snakes bats and dogs.

In this way the psychic fame of Vamakshepa spread all round and all kinds of people came to him. There was a priest called Nagen Panda. He was firmly of the view that the word of Vamakshepa would restore life to the dying. He brought before him a man who was on the point of death. But contrary to his expectation Vamakshepa merely uttered the word 'fat' which means 'gone' and indeed he was gone. The priest accused him of killing the man ; but Vamakshepa assured him that he was not responsible in as much as it was the Mother that spoke through him. But it must be stated that such cases were rare for he blessed those who approached him with reverence and sincerity and his words came true. Once a young widow offered him her salutation and he blessed her that she might have children. At first she was shocked but his words came true, for she married a Vaisnava devotee and became the mother of a large family. The Maharaja of Burdwan was without children. He came to pay a visit to Vamakshepa but he came with such pomp and pageant that Vamakshepa did not relish it. The repentant Maharaja came again as an humble suitor and the saint blessed that he might have a son born to him. And that blesssing come to be true.

Vamakshepa used to say that he was not learned in the Sastras. Mother revealed every thing to him. As time advanced he became more and more interested in the contemplation of the Mother and was deeply absorbed in Samadhi. Then came the great call from the Mother and he attained Mahasamadhi on an auspicious day in the month of Sravan. in 1911 A. D.

RAMPRASAD

Ramprasad was famous throughtout Bengal as the ballad bard of Sakti worship and he holds an honoured place among those who worship God as Mother. He was a noted exponent of Tantric practice and he knew how to distil the spirit of devotion out of song for song came to him as the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions. Although Mother worship as was practised in those days, had its terrible aspect Ramprasad knew how to select the beneficient and the tender side of it, for his was the religion of love. The garland of songs which he offered to the Mother has also set the mark of literary excellence and that was why it had a powerful attraction on all people both the average and the scholarly. In subsequent ages other great souls such as Vamakshepa, Kamalakanta and Sri Ramkrishna found in him the source and fount of their inspiration.

Ramprasad was born in the month of Aswin (September-October) in the year 1720 A. D. at Halishar, a village on the eastern bank of the Ganges. The village of Halishar had produced in earlier ages another remarkable person in Iswar Puri who was the spiritual guide of Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya. Thus the two great cults of Bengal, that of Krishna worship and of Mother worship found here their common birthplace.

The father of Ramprasad came from a respectable Vaidya family. Although the outside world knew him only as Ram Ram Sen he was at heart a Tantric devotee like his more famous son. Ramprasad led a very meritorious life from boyhood and was well versed in grammar and epic literature. He was acquainted with Persian and Urdu. As name, fame and worldly success held very little attraction for him he did not feel it to be incumbent upon him to practise the family profession of Ayurvedic medicine. The father of Ramprasad Sen however had other ideas. He wished to bind his son in holy wedlock so that he might continue to lead a seculiar life and with that aim in view he chose for his son a girl named Sarvani who was well accomplished and who was noted for her exquisite beauty. Shortly there after the newly married pair were initiated by the family guru.

Destiny did not wish that Ramprasad should be indifferent to the call of the world. Some time later with the passing away of his father, as the source of family income dried up, he found it difficult to meet the expenses of the family. Necessity compelled him to find out some source of earning his living. He was, as said before, doubtlessly proficient in poetry, philosophy and grammar as well as in the Persian and Urdu languages. In spite of his extraordinary merit he could not secure any job easily as he had none to back him. It thus happened that by God's grace he found himself holding the post of Muhari or accountant in the estate of Durga Charan Mitra, the zamindar of Garanhatta, Calcutta. Although he was free from worldly wants he felt the spirit within. It was in this way that the Mother bestowed Her grace upon him and called upon him to give expression to his spontaneous overflow of song and as the Spirit urged, he interpersed his account book with songs which he composed. He was the paid accountant of the zamindar for his belly's sake. He was the unpaid accountant of the Mother singing songs unbidden he must. The account book became a book of songs and complaints reached the ear of the zamindar accusing the accountant of indifference to his duties.

One day the zaminder wished to check the account book. He found that the charge had some basis but he also felt that his accountant was destined to a far greater task. One song specially impressed him very much, he wrote "O Mother, grant me the post of your cashier for I am not a traitor to Thee; I am your servant who receives no pay and all that I seek is your lotus feet". This song specially appealed to the zamindar for it might be that he had himself an unconscious bias towards religion. And so he said to Ramprasad that he was henceforth free to persue his chosen line of spiritual development exclusively and that the usual salary would be paid to him as a sinecure.

Ramprasad thus returned to Halisahar. He was now free from want and anxiety and he plunged whole heartedly in his chosen vocation. He was to be seen either in his room or plunged neck deep in the water of the Ganges singing the glory of the Mother. The song which he composed and sang exercised a peculiar fascination over all, the boatman while passing on the Ganges used to pause and listen to his song. One such interested listener was Krishna chandra, the king of Nadia. A jeweller knows the worth of the genuine jewel. He felt attracted by the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions which characterised the songs of Ramprasad and he invited the nature's poet to come to his place and sing in his presence. Ramprasad was a Sadhaka and song was part of his Sadhana and he therefore declined with thanks the royal invitation on the plea that he did not wish to leave his place of Sadhana and be deprived of the bliss of the Mother's affection. The king however out of consideration to the noble minded soul granted him a hundred bighas of tax free land. Ramprasad in his turn composed a drama 'Vidya sundar' and presented it to the king. Another interested listerner was Sirajuddolla, the Nawab of Bengal. While sailing on the Ganges in his boat the Nawab heard Ramprasad sing as he was seated on one of the bathing ghats. The Nawab wished to hear some more of his songs. Ramprasad began a song in Urdu but the Nawab wished to hear only the devotional songs in the praise of the Mother of the universe.

A new chapter opened in the life of Ramprasad. He selected a clean place nearby, planted there a Panchavati consisting of Bilwa, Nim, Amlaki, Aswatha and Banian trees there in their midist he built a Panchamundi Asana by placing underneath heads of five dead bodies e, g. of man, monkey, jackal, mongoose and snake, four on different corners and one in the middle. It was thus that he began his Sadhana and worshipped the Mother at midnight. He composed some more songs which he offered to the Mother with great devotion mingled with his tears and all that he desired was to realise the Absolue in the manifest form of the Mother. It was atonce a sweet pure relationship although it was not without its entreaties and quarrels. Nowhere perhaps can we find a parallel to it in the religious literature of the world. It is true that the Mother represents the universal Principle—the Principle of creation, sustenance and dissolution of all sentient beings. But there is at the same time an intimate personal relationship—for the devotee is Her child who feels a restless longing for the Divine touch and the Divine presence. At times She puts innumerable obstacles in the path of the devotee and then, as in the flash of lightining all these are removed only to give place to the joy of relation.

It thus happened that during a particular cyclonic period the bamboo fencing which enclosed the house of Ramprasad was raised to the ground. He had no money to hire a labourer and he could not postpone it to a later date. With the help of his young daughter Jagadiswari who took her station on the other side he continued the task of repairing the fencing. To the accompaniment of songs in honour of the Mother the work of repairing went on apace. Although in the meantime Jagadiswari was called away the work of repairing did not stop. When the work was almost complete she returned and asked him who it was that had helped him. It was only then that he knew that the Mother Herself had helped him in the form of his only daughter. On another occasion he went for a bath in the Ganges, an unknown beautiful girl accosted him on the way and wished to hear a few songs from him. He told her that it was getting late for midday worship and that he would sing her a few songs when the worship was over. Afterwards when she was sought for she was to be found no more in any place and he knew that too was play of the Mother. After the offering he sat to meditate and then there appeared before him a glow of light all round him and out of it he heard the voice of the Mother Annapurna complaining in a gentle and affectionate tone that She had come all the way from far Benares to hear his songs and that She had a to go way disappointed. Ramprasad felt highly vexed with himself. He decided that he would start at once and go to Benaras walking all the way. As he reached Tribeni ghat on foot he was tired and took rest under a tree on the bank of the Ganges. But he when heard the same sweet voice once again bidding him to stay where he was he heard the Mother say 'I do not live in Benares only. I pervade the whole universe. My altar is the heart of the devotee'. It was a call to sing the glory of the Mother to his heart's content. He composed some songs and sang them before the Mother. These songs are the most valuable treasures of the religious literatures of Bengal. By the grace of the Mother he came to realise that whatever place is touched by the holy feet of the Mother is sacred and that Her holy feet are as sacred as Benares, the Ganges and with this conviction he returned to Halishar.

Shortly after this there was bereavement in the family for his mother Saraswati Devi passed away. By this time his son Ram Dulal had grown to be young and he took upon himself the responsibility of looking after the family. Ramprasad felt the urge to free himself from all the fetters which bound him to the world. His yearning to have the vision of the Mother knew no bounds and had no respite. He sat on his Panchamundi Asana with a firm resolve that he would either attain success or perish in the attempt. And to his intense delight the Mother appeared before him in all Her radiance. So keen was his sense of joy that he felt that it was almost insupportable. Next morning he woke up from God intoxicating vision only to find that a big crowd had collected around him.

That divine vision opened a new chapter in his life. He was at peace within himself and a fresh garland of songs came out in unending succession. In as much as those songs were divinely inspired that have preserved that divine fervour which is felt by the listeners in succeeding ages. It has quenched the spiritual thirst of Ramprasad ; other ages have come in turn to quench in that same fount of song their spiritual thirst as well.

As the inspired singer becomes in turn the source of inspiration to others Ramprasad found himself surrounded by a large number of admirers drawn from all walks of life.

Among them the most distinguished was Maharaj Krishna Chandra of Navadwip. Another distinguished visitor was Ajodhyanath Goswami (alias Aju Gossain), a Vaisnava poet and a native of Halishar ; he hit the Saktas through his compositions and songs on Vishnu. In those days there was rivalry between the Saktas and the Vaisnavas and so the king found himself in the midst of a keen religious disputation evoked by ardent devotion. Aju Gossain was a dialectician. Although he could hit hard he could not have the same fervour as Ramprasad. Thus it was that the king began to appreciate the real worth of Ramprasad more particularly when the latter sat for meditation on the Divine Mother at dead of night and practised Tantric rites sincerely and sang songs of the Mother with great devotion.

Ramprasad was not satisfied with the mere vision of the Mother. He wished to see the Mother constantly under the guidance of his guru. With the help of the Tantric Sanyasin Krishnananda Agambagis who was the author of many Tantric works he practised first Vamacher Sadhana and then Kaulachar Sadhana. As the grace of the Mother descended upon him he practised each stage of the Sadhana with success and proceeded to the next. He also practised the most difficult Sava Sadhana by sitting on a dead body on new moon night Amavasya tilhi on a cremation ground—a place of terror to others. Thus by the grace of the Mother he succeeded in all the tests of Sadhana and realised the Mother inside and outside and in every thing, his life overflowed in divine Bliss.

It is said that on account of the fulness of vision several miracles took place. To take an instance, when he was singing at Panchavati with great devotion on the glory of the Mother, the Mother appeared before him at the dead of night and he wished to offer some flower at Her lotus feet. He did not find any flower near by but on examination he found two habiscus flowers (red Java, the favourite flower of the Mother) near him? blossoming on the sprout of some other species of of plants. On another occasion he was meditating on the Mother on the new moon night. A cyclone came, trees were uprooted and houses were raised to the ground. But the Panchavati and the house of Ramprasad remained intact and not a drop of water had fallen within his compound. The neighbours were astonished to find the house of Ramprasad uneffected by this severe cyclone.

As he advanced in his Sadhana Ramprasad realised that it is the Mother Herself who has become Krishna, the adored of the Vaisnavas, that the Mother is the Absolute concretised for the devotees and that She is the all pervading Being. In this way he attained the synthesis of religion.

The songs of Ramprasad have ranked as the high water mark of devotional literature in Bengal. As such they have left the undelible impression on society at large. It is interesting to note that Sri Ram krishna also used to sing at times the songs of Ramprasad. His work was over. It was high time for him to lay his head on the lap of the eternal Mother. He had come to be eighty years old and he knew that his hour had come. When the time came he entered the Ganges breast deep and chanted the glory of the Mother. The vital breath passed away by way of the spinal column which the Kundalini takes in its upward ascend, for such was his last wish. His life became one with the Universal and his song remained as the collective heritage of the people.

KRISHNANANDA AGAMBAGIS

In the last part of the fifteenth century Krishnananda Agambagis was born as the eldest son of Maheswar Bhattacharya of Navadwip ; he was destined to be a path-finder in the realm of the spirit. The family was distinguished for its Tantric tradition which they had inherited from their original home in north Bengal. Afterwards they settled at Agameswartala in Navadwip. Though Navadwip was at that time the centre of Vaisnava learning Sakti cult also had influence ; two courses of spiritual practices were prevalent side by side ; both the sects were spreading their respective cultures among their adherents but in the course of time they changed their direction. Young Krishnananda felt the impact of both these currents of thought. Krishnananda was a Sakta, devoted to the worship of the Mother ; his brother Sahasraksa was a devoted Vaisnava and he worshipped Gopal. While in one part of the house the worship of Gopal went on, in another part of the house the worship of the Mother was carried on with equal devotion. It thus happened that on one occasion they had a bunch of plantain fruits in their garden. Krishnananda wished to offer it to the Mother but he found that his brother already forestalled him in order that he might offer it to his chosen ideal, Krishna.

The worship of the Mother goes on at midnight. Krishnananda conducted the worship as usual though his mind sat on the plantains which he could not offer to the Mother. When the worship was over and when he was about to retire he saw a strange gleam of light emnating from the shrine room. When he saw wherefrom the light came a strange sight met him. Gopal was seated on the lap of the

Mother and She was feeding him with the identical plantain. From that moment the veil of ignorance dropped and he came to realise that Gopal and the Mother are identical only differing in names and forms and he ceased to entertain narrow sectarian ideas. From that time he added the worship of Krishna to the rest of his Tantric rites; and instead of worshipping the Mother on dark Amavasya nights only he worshipped Her every night. He had selected a lonely cremation ground on the bank of the Ganges as being far from the bustle of the town and there under a big banian tree which used to shelter owls and jackals, he errected his place of meditation and practised meditation on the Mother as inculcated in the Tantric works.

Krishnananda was not satisfied with the degenerate form of worship which was then in vogue. The worship was performed in Yantra or a Pot. He prayed to the Mother to keep the cult of Mother worship alive, he also prayed that the worship of the Mother should be in images so that the Sakti cult may benefit all, but he did not know how else he could worship the Mother. It was then that the Mother, out of abounding grace taught him how best he could worship Her. He was asked to worship the first living woman form in which She would reveal Herself and which he would see on the next morning and he should introduce that form of image for the worship of the Mother for that would be the most suitable form through which the Mother would reveal Herself to him.

On his way to the Ganges for his bath in the morning he saw before him a beautiful little girl; She had three lotus pettelled eyes having a gracious and pitiful look, bright teeth, long black curling hairs hanging up to Her knees, tongue half out as if She felt shame at the sight of a stranger, dark complexion, radiant face in a symbolic divine pose as if She were granting boon with one hand and assuring protection with the other ; She had sword in the third hand and a skull on the fourth hand, She wore the cloth of hands round Her waist, garland of skulls on Her neck, Her right leg lifted on the breast of Her husband, left one on his thigh. Krishnananda felt thrilled, a divine sense of joy filled his heart ; he wished to worship the Mother in the image modelled after the vision that he saw.

In a corner of his house he built a kuti and errected a Panchamundi Asana as prescribed by the Tantra by placing underneath five heads of dead bodies e,g, of man, monkey, jackal, mongoose and snake, four on four corners and one in the middle. Out of the mud of Ganges he prepared an image modelled after what he saw ; he worshipped the Mother every night and in the morning he immersed the image in the Ganges. Under the instruction of a Tantric Kaul named Jatadhari Paramhamsa he practised a special kind of Sadhana. One night just before concluding the appointed worship he saw in his God intoxicated vision the shining form of the Mother and shortly there after a wonderful being tall of stature with red sandal paste on his forehead and with matted hair wearing a red robe. What he saw resembled a Tantric Sanyasin. Although his room was bolted from within the figure entered his room and blessed him whole heartedly.

In order to help the aspirants he wrote two works entitled Tantrasara and Tattvabodhini ; only the most learned could follow them, although it was his desire that every one should benefit by his works. In the course of time the Raja of Nadia came to know of the Mother worship in the image and he invited Krishnananda to his court. When the king himself set the example the cult of the Mother worship spread all over the land and Krishnananda thus found himself to be the chosen instrument of spreading the cult. It is not known when he entered Mahasamadhi.

KAMALAKANTA

Kamalakanta was born of a poor Brahmin family at the village of Ambika Kalna in the district of Burdwan. probably in the year 1773 A.D. His father was a poor Brahmin priest of the name of Maheswar Bhattacharya. Kamalakanta lost his father at an early age and his mother Mayadevi who ran the household with great difficulty out of the little income derived from their land however took care to have him properly educated at the village school. When it became extremely difficult for her to manage the family and educate her son she came to her father's place and settled there. After finishing his study at the village school Kamalakanta proceeded to study Sanskrit under a learned pundit and it opened out for him his latent poetic talents. He had a special talent in music also and it was as a composer and musician that he found his special vocation. By that time he was invested with the sacred thread and as a result a great change came over his nature. He was instructed by Chandra Shekhar Goswami, a highly spiritual soul. Noticing the indifferent attitude of the son his mother got him married with a beautiful girl but she died an immature death. He had to marry again under forces of circumstances. After his initiation by Kenaram Bhattacharya, a great Tantric Sadhaka his life changed, yet to maintain his family he started a Sanskrit toll to impart sanskrit education among others. He lived on the poor income of his priesthood with difficulty. His poverty was so extreme that he could not maintain his family and children. Some times it so happened that some unknown beautiful girl (Mother) sent for the family some food and other accessories of worship for the worship of his chosen deity so that he might be free from anxiety and She (Mother) hear sweet songs from Her son as She used to hear from Ramprasad. He was to be found in the temple of Vishalakshi worshipping the Mother with great earnestness and utter simplicity of heart. As he was also noted for his sense of justice and his outspokenness the king of Burdwan had him appointed afterwards as one of his court pundits.

With the lapse of time the latent religious attitude in him became more and more pronounced. He worshipped the deity and spent the rest of his time in devotion and in singing the songs to the glory of Mother Kali. Tej Chandra, the king of Burdwan took him as his guru and had a house constructed for him at Kotalpat near Burdwan. There he lived a peaceful life. We are told that Kamalakanta was married twice. When his first wife who was a beautiful woman passed away he married again one who was remarkably loyal to him. In his house Kamalakanta had a shrine room and his annual Kali-puja was a great occasion. It was an ideal household in which the wife was devoted to the husband and the husband to God. When one of the officers of Tej Chandra accused Kamalakanta of being a henpecked husband he taught him to revise his views and to regard all women as incarnations of the Mother and he also pointed out to him that a devoted and pure wife should not be regarded as an obstacle in the path of religion for that is what the Sastras say. From that time forward that officer also became one of his disciples.

When the second wife of Kamalakanta passed away, during the occasion of her cremation he composed beautiful songs to commemorate the occasion. As usual it was addressed to the Mother Kali, the presiding deity of cremation thus 'O Mother Kali, what is fated by Srinath (Siva) cannot be blotted. As you like to live in the cremation ground so does your beloved husband Siva, I do not mind whether you keep me in happiness or in misery, for I shall test you by way in which you behave towards me, your son.' It is said that these songs of Kamalakanta exercised a rare fascination over all and even the wild animals, when the songs were sung became gentle and mild, the venomous snake lifted its hood to hear it and dance according to the tune and the child stopped crying. What is more important is that they brought consolation to Kamalakanta in great bereavement.

On another occasion when Kamalakanta was returning from a neighbouring village the sun set and he found himself in the decoit infested area called 'Orgayer Danga.' He was surrounded by cruel men who knew no pity. They stripped him of every thing and threatened him with dire death. Kamalakanta sought their permission to prepare himself to meet his end; the prayer which he uttered to the Mother in the form of a song as his last refuge in the hour of distress was so appealing that even the decoits were moved. They returned to him all they had stolen, begged his pardon and departed.

Again and again how the Mother came to his rescue is brought out by one more episode. Tej Chandra's son Pratap was a great devotee of Kamalakanta. But the temple priests who were jealous of his influence, brought against him the chare that in the form of worship much wine drinking went on. When Tej Chandra paid a surprise visit the wine had miraculously changed into milk ; butter was prepared out of it and it was made use of in pouring sacrificial oblations to the Mother.

It is not known how long Kamalakanta lived. All that we know that when his end approached the king himself paid a visit. Kamalakanta requested him to come again at mid day on the next day and to take him to the Ganges and he asked him to lay his body on the earth. Then there arose a flood of water from the earth and the body of the guru was carried away by the Ganges. The Maharaj and others present on the spot were struck with wonder ; for Mother Kali alone knows how to take back in Her lap the life which She had enriched by Her gracious presence.

Kamalakanta was not only a great Sadhaka, he was also a gifted poet, his songs inspired other gifted singers and Sadhakas. Special mention may be made of some of them, such as Shyama sangeet, Vijaya, Sadhak Ranjan, Agamani, Siva sangeet and Krishna sangeet. They have earned the appreciation of other Sadhakas and have shown the path to spiritual realisation. Hara prasad Sastri and other savants have spoken highly of his songs.

A song composed and sung by Kamalakanta will show the intensity of his devotion towards his chosen deity. He wrote— There is nothing in this world which is true and permanent, Mother Shyama (Kali) alone is true and is Eternal, She is the essence, Kali alone is my meditation, my knowledge and my life. After coming to this world who is there that is not miserable but a vision of Her even once can remove all sorrows and this is the speciality of the Mother. Having taken human birth some are happy no doubt with kingdom but for me who am poor Her bright feet are my support and I value them as the most precious necklace. Oh my mind, do not get entangled in the tie of illusion which causes repeated birth and death, take refuge in the lotus feet of the Mother, She alone can grant fearlessness and you will surely reach beyond death at ease.

MADHUSUDAN SARASWATI.

The village of Unsia was formerly a part of Vikrampur in the district of Dacca. It is now under Kotalipara Pargana in the district of Faridpur. It was formerly a part of the territory of king Kandarpanarayan and a famous seat of learning. The terrible mountain stream of Padma runs past the village and she has been playing through the ages a very whimsical role, sometimes eroding her banks and sometimes forming new islands. She was atonce the destroyer and the preserver of the lives of people. The Brahmins of this place maintained a tradition of culture.

It was in this environment that Madhusudan Saraswati who was destined to leave an indelible mark in every department of literature was born of a cultured Brahmin family in the year 1525 A D. He was the fourth son of his father Pramada Purandarcharya. He inherited in full measure the keen intellectual capacity of his father who was well read in scriptures and was, besides a well known poet greatly honoured in the assembly of Kandarpanarayan of Chandradwip.

On one occasion both the father and the son called upon the king but they received a cold reception as the king was very much worried on account of the threatened invasion of his territory by the Muslims. Be that as it mav, the apathy of of the king made a deep impression upon the boy. Their way home lay through flooded fields and rough current. While they were in the boat Madhusudan asked the permission of his father to leave home and to take up a life of renunciation. He told his father that it is much better to seek divine favour than to seek the favour of a rich man; for he felt that the king's conduct was not only an insult to his father but also to the scripture and to religion. As he was barely twelve years of age, his proposal came as a shock to his father. Although he was very affectionate towards his son he could not say anything against the proposition; for although the boy was of tender age he was already ripe in discrimination. His father had throughout life sought to follow the path of Nisreyas, but he could not overcome the spell of Maya and he felt that what he could not fulfil his son might accomplish. He blessed his son so that he might be successful and he asked him to obtain the permission of his mother who was not less fond of him. After a good deal of persuation he obtained his mother's permission also on the condition that he should proceed to Nabadwip in order to seek shelter in Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya. His father urged that he should take Sanyas only after he had attained the requisite intellectual fitness.

The giving up of home by this tender boy created a stir in the society of Kotalipara. No one could have envisaged the future greatness that lay in wait for him, that he would one day become a champion of Advaita Vedanta and resuscitate the philosophy of Acharya Sankar or that he would be for ages to come a shining example, of the life of renunciation.

With the permission of his parents he left home on a great cause ; but he was also penniless. On the way he had to ford a great river. When he found neither any house nor boat near by he prayed to the presiding deity of the river Janwavi who appeared before him and assured him that he could cross the river easily. He prayed further that he would like to cross not this particular river only but that he would like to cross that stream of Samsara also ; and he secured the assurance of the deity- Within a short time a fisherman appeared on the scene with his boat and out of kindness took the boy across the river.

The boy then reached Nabadwip with great difficulty but to his inexpressible sorrow he learnt that Mahaprabhu had left Nabadwip for Nilachal (Puri) for good. He was then in a dilemma as to what he should do and he found no peace within him. He visited various holy places in quest of peace. Although he had voluntarily embraced a life of renunciation he was fully conscious of the promise he had made that he would master the scriptures and make himself fit for Sanyas. Of the three places of culture, Benares Mithila and Nabadwip he selected the last mentioned centre of learning for it was the seat of Nyaya school of philosophy and students come to it from all places. Here he studied under Mathuranath whose fame was only second to that of Raghunath Siromoni. Mathuranath was charmed with the poetic genius and the keen intellect as well as with the straight forwardness of the beautiful boy and under his care the disciple attained mastery of the subject before long. He mastered the Tattwachintamani of Gangesh Upadhyaya and the commentaries of Paksadhar Misra and of Raghunath Siromani. Mathuranath thought that the boy must be helped by divine power to master such an intricate subject within such a short time.

The young disciple had from boyhood a natural bent of mind which favoured a life of devotion as was taught by Mahaprabhu. The study of Nyaya with its dualistic philosophy ripened this attitude of devotion. According to the Nyaya system God, the soul and the world are distinct entities. Upon deeper study of the subject he decided to write a book in support of the metaphysics of dualism and establish the teachings of Mahaprabhu on a philosophical basis. But he found before long that Advaita philosophy as profounded by Acharya Sankara stood in his way. He therefore wished to study the philosophy of Sankara thoroughly in order that he might express thoroughly its weak points and thereby establish the glory of dualism and the philosophy of devotion.

For that purpose the proper place was Benares. It is a long way from Nabadwip. In those days there were none of the modern facilities for travel. The penniless boy braved the horrors of the forest and of decoits by the way side and set out with his precious bundle of manuscripts, determined to realise the chosen goal in life. On reaching Benares he met many famous Vedantic scholars and Sanyasins such as Ram Tirtha, Upendra Tirtha, Narayan Bhatta, Madhava Saraswati, Nrisimha Swami, Jagannath Asram, Krishna Tirtha and Visveswar Saraswati. He began to study higher Vedanta under Ram Tirtha who felt very satisfied with his pupil for he found in him all the great necessary qualifications for studing higher Vedanta, such as a keen intellect, renunciation, discrimination, indifference to material well being, a great love of labour and the habit of severe austerity. Within a short time he acquired by his extraordinary genius and depth of keen merit, complete mastery over the many difficult works of Adaita Vedanta. His knowledge of the subject enabled him to take part in a scriptural contest like the Vedantic scholars Nrisimha Swami and Upendra Tirtha. He noticed incidently the profound learning of Narayan Bhatta, a south Indian scholar who refuted the arguments of the Vedantic scholars above mentioned. He then decided to study Mimansa philosophy under Madhava Saraswati who was a noted scholar both in Nyaya and Mimansa.

As he was endowed with a keen intellect he mastered the intricacies of the subject in a short time. He then came to realize the truth that lay behind the subtle philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. A new light dawned upon him. He also came to realize that real knowledge is identical with real devotion. He found support for it in the scriptures and he felt vexed with himself that he found fault with such a profund philosophy.

The repentent scholar went to his teacher Ram Tirtha and he confessed to him how it was that he originally concealed from him his real intention in studying Vedanta and how with greater acquaintance he came to accept its tenets. The sincerity of Madhusudan charmed the teacher; for he had ever been the most intelligent and the most well behaved of his students. Swami Ram Tirtha embraced his pupil warmly and advised him to take Sanyas which confers the highest blessings of life in as much as it puts an end to the cycle of birth and death. The master also advised his pupil who had attained proficiency in Navya Nyaya to make use of his learning to refute the dualistic doctrine of Vyasthirtha whose work 'Nyayamrita' had done great harm to the spread of Advaita Vedanta. Vyasthirtha was a follower of Madhwacharya who upheld the doctrine of dualism.

As Madhusudan wished to carry out the desire of his teacher that he should refute dualism and establish monism. Madhusudan brought out after strenuous labour his work 'Advaita Siddhi' which might undoubtedly claim to be the historical asset in the literary world. It might be stated that no such outstanding work on the subject had been written before. After successfully acomplishing the task assigned to him, as a result of which he placed Advaita upon a firm footing, he approached Visveswar Saraswati ino rder to be initiated into Sanyas. As the preceptor was well acquainted with the intellectual calibre of Madhusudan he told him that what is essential for Sanyas are devotion to God and indifference to the world and that he wished to test him and find out if his desire to obtain Sanyas was the result of temporary emotional reaction or whether it was the outcome of a deep rooted desire for God realisation. He said further that he was going on a pilgrimage and that he would confer Sanyas on him after his return and he desired that he should spend his interval in writing a commentary of the Gita. Madhusudan labour eduntiringly at the given task and he brought out a commentary of outstanding literary merit in which he reconciled knowledge and devotion and brought out their harmony. On his return from his pilgrimage Visveswar Saraswati read through the work and was extremely charmed with it. From that time onward Madhusudan came to be known as Madhusudan Saraswati.

After being initiated into Sanyas Madhusudan devoted his time entirely to spiritual practices and he followed a strict course of discipline as instructed by the guru. He lived in an humble cottage on the bank of the river Jamuna which was specially selected by his guru when he was on pilgrimage. It was there that Madhusudan settled to a life of spiritual austerity.

One day he was immersed in deep meditation seated on a sand dune. Emperor Akbar approached him in disguise with his wife who was a victim of incurable colic. As all medical treatment had failed the emperor sought the Sadhu for a faith cure, as all other means had failed. He waited for a long while. When Madhusudan came down to body conciousness the queen approached and requested him to bless her so that her disease might be cured. Madhusudan said 'My mother, by the grace of God you will be cured very soon'; and it came to pass. The emperor then revealed his identity and wished to offer him immense wealth. Madhusudan politely declined the offer. As a result of it the reputation of the learned swami spread far and wide and among those who were most pleased with him was his guru Visveswar Saraswati.

Madhusudan thereupon settled in Benares which is not only a holy city but also a centre of learning and there he continued to live at Choussatti yogini ghat. He was no longer the unknown boy of Kotalipara, who had been ignored by the king Kandarpanarayan. He was now honoured as the unexcelled leader of the Vedantins of the day. He was not only honoured by the Sanyasins of Benares but also by the whole of India by the grace of God and the guru. Disciples came to him from far and near; among them were some who had been deputed by teachers of other schools of thought and make it an instrument of refutation of Advaita and the establishment of their own schools of thought. Jiva Goswami was one of them but even they were welcome ; he bestowed his grace equally on them all for he knew very well the motive with which they came to him.

Madhusudan Saraswati, we are told, occasionally used to visit Tulsidas, the famous Vaisnava Acharya and the author of Ramcharitmanas. Among his many achievements was the arming of the Naga Sanyasins for the protection of the Sanyasins who as a class were denied justice and protection and were persecuted by the Mullas or Mohamedan priests who enjoyed the court favour. Once Goraknath, the well known Yogi and the founder of the Nath sect of sanyasins came to him with a view to test him. He wished to offer him a famous jewel called the Chintama niratna which could fulfil every wish of its owner. Madhusudan accepted it on condition that he was free to do whatever he liked with it and on receiving it he flung it into the river. Thus he stood the test of sainthood which is renunciation. Goraknath laughed at it in great joy, the jeweller alone knows the worth of the jewels ; and he went away acknowledging Madhusudan Saraswati as the greatest Sanyasins of the age.

About the year 1632, at the ripe age of 107 he attained Mahasamadhi at Hardwar on the bank of the Ganges. Although he was a great staunch follower of Advaita Vedanta, he was a devotee of Sri krishna who is also regarded as the Jneyatita, being Nirguna and Nirvisesha. Hence it is that there is no contradiction here ; there are gradations of devotion. In this way both knowledge and devotion are reconciled. At first one begins as a servant and finally attains Advaita conciousness. Scriptures support it.

LOKANATH BRAHAMCHARI

Some time about the year 1731, Lokanath Brahmachari was born as the fourth son of a pious Brahmin named Ram Kanai Goshal of Kachua near Barasat in the district of Twenty-four-ganas. His mother Kamala Devi, too, was a pious lady. As the parents were very eager that the son also should be brought up in the path of virtue and of religion, the father entrusted the care of his son's education to a very competent Brahmin named Bhagaban Ganguly who was not only a great scholar but also an eminent Sadhaka.

After he was invested with the sacred thread at the age of about twelve Lokanath, along with his friend Beni Madhav Mukherjee who, too, was of about the same age, left for Kalighat in the company of his guru who was at that time about sixty years of age. Kalighat was in those days forest area uninhabited by people. There were only a few Sadhakas and Brahmacharins who were practising austerity at that holy Saktipita. The Brahmacharins were too young to understand the greatness of their guru or the seriousness with which they could view the supreme quest of life viz the realisation of God. But the guru who was full of compassion, impressed upon them the real nature of the quest and himself undertook the task of begging food for the disciples inspite of his advanced age and other difficulties. When the preceptor perceived that his disciples were fickle occasionally teasing the Sadhus, out of curiosity that their attention was misdirected by indifferent company around them he decided to take them to the Himalayan region. In the course of their peregrinations they came in contact with a very powerful yogi named Hitalal Misra who, some people say, was none other than the great

Trailanga Swami of Benares. With the passing away of the guru the charge of the young disciples devoloved upon him and under his guidance they practised yoga for many years. In his company they travelled in the Himalayas and in Tibbet. As directed by the yogi the two disciples came to east Bengal, one of them came to Kamakshya and the other to Sita kunda in the Chittagong district (East Pakistan).

It is said that one Vangu Karmakar of Baradi in the district of Dacca dicovered Lokanath Brahmachari who saved him from great difficulty. Vangu brought him home and served him faithfully till death. Lokanath then lived in a kutia near the burning ghat of Baradi. Baradi is a village on the bank of the river Brahmaputra, and thousands of pilgrims come there to have a bath in the holy river; the pilgrims paid their homage to the holy man. As Lokanath Brahmachari had a beautiful complexion, long hands, penetrating and attractive eyes, his very sight was sufficient to impress others with his yogic powers. We are told that Vijay Krishna Goswami, the famous leader and Acharya of the Dacca Brahma samaj, felt, when he entered the Ashram, as though a great spiritual current was flowing through him. It was an unprecedented event in his life. Lokanath Brahmachari reminded Vijay Krishna Goswami of an episode that had happened in his life at an earlier stage. When he was practising spiritual austerity in a forest which was infested with wild animals and when a great forest fire broke out he was miraculously saved by a Mahatma who appeared on the scene.

On a different occasion a woman devotee brought a cup of milk to the Ashram At that time Lokanath Brahmachari was saying loudly to some 'come in'. There upon a very poisonous snake came out with upraised hood and drank of the milk from the cup which the Brahmachari held out in his hand. The yogi then told the snake 'you may go' and the snake retreated as though it were a domesticated animal. And the sequel of the story is more interesting. There was present at that time a police officer named Gour Gopal Roy. He was offered as Prasada that was left over by the snake. He drank it and no harm befell him. There are other equally startling episodes. Once a woman died leaving a very young child. Thanks to the blessings of the Brahmachari the barren aunt of the baby was able to breast feed the child and rear him.

From their talks with the Brahmachari the people came to know that in company with his friend Beni and his guru Hitalal he had trodden not only over the snowy region of the Himalayas but he had also spent some time travelling in China where he was arrested on suspicion of being a spy, and was subsequently released by the government when they were convinced fully that he was a yogi and not a spy. We are told that he travelled in Arabia also and had visited Mecca and that he was honoured by the Muslims who gave him purely vegetarian food. It was here that he met the great Muslim fakir Abdul Gaffur. It is stated that he visited some of the lands of the Atlantic coast. We are told that on one occasion when he was practising severe austerities at Chandranath, he encountered a very ferocious tigress with new born cubs. Far from doing him harm the tigress behaved as though it were a tame animal and helped to save him as we shall presently see.

On another occasion when two druken ruffians entered the Ashram at Chandranath with deadly weapons with some intention they saw a tiger enter the Ashram with a fierce roar. The ruffians hid themselves through fear ; and to their surprise they found the tiger licking the feet of the yogi. After the tiger had departed they fell prostrate before him and begged pardon of him. We are told that there existed a very loving relationship between the yogi and the birds, bees and ants. The birds would sit on his matted hair in quest of food and the ants would pass in a row receiving the sugar that was spread for them ; his joy then knew no bounds. Within the lapse of time the devotees, the poor and the sick found in the Ashram at Baradi a haven of refuge. In this way the fame of the Ashram spread far and wide and along with it its social activities specially in ameliorating the sufferings of the people increased. Among the visitors who came to the Ashram special mention may be made of Raja Rajendra Narayan, the powerful zamindar of Bhowal. He came on his elephant with a large retinue of followers. On the way the Raja decided that he would not prostrate before the yogi as he did not know to what to caste the yogi belonged, but on seeing the simple person the Raja prostrated before the yogi who then asked if he had changed his mind. The Raja was struck with wonder as to how the Brahmachari could read his thought.

The life of the Sadhu was now divided between a life of meditation and a life of social service. The people flocked in their hundreds in order to seek the grace of the Brahmachari and he could not be an indifferent spectator of their misery. He wished to serve them in whatever way he could either materially or spiritually. As he was now living in the midst of society it was necessary that he, too, should conform to the social pattern. Although he was accustomed to live in the

Himalayan snows without clothing and with no food except roots and fruits he now wore warm winter clothing and sustained himself on the usual food like the rest. His love and grace flowed munificently to all. All those who were in need of his heeling power whether in body or in mind availed themselves of it. He used his yogic powers at times to bring about a miraculous cure. One day there came to doctor Nishi kanta Basu who was practising in America, a very respectable American lady who had been a life long sufferer from acute colic and who had tried in vain the various prescription of the doctors. She thought that Indian yogis may be acquainted with some rare medicines. Doctor Basu admitted his ignorance of Yoga. When she was talking with the doctor she saw behind him a tall Indian figure with matted hair who put in her hand some Indian herb. The doctor did not see who the person was but he was amazed to see the herb in the hand of the lady. She took it and was cured. From her description of the person whom she saw the doctor concluded that it must be Loknath Brahmachari for the doctor was closely related with the Nag family of Baradi. From that time the lady's faith in Indian yogi increased thousandfold.

We are told of another rare incident which happened in his life. One Nibaran Chandra Roy was about to be sentenced to capital punishment for some criminal offence. While waiting with trepidation for judgement to be pronounced, he thought in his last moment, of Lokanath Brahmachari; the yogi appeared before him in a dream and told him that he had just then pronounced judgement and that his life was safe. Next day Nibaran found, to his astonishment, that he was a free man and that the judgement was in his fnvour. After a long stay of twenty seven years at Baradi Lokanath Brahmachari felt that his end was drawing near. He gave his last instructions to his disciples as to what they should do with his body which he regarded as being no better than a bird's cage. On 18th Jaistha, 1890, he entered Mahasamadhi, to the great sorrow of his devotees, for he had been all his life their friend, philosopher and guide.

BALANANDA BRAHMACHARI

Pitambar was born of a poor but learned Saraswat Brahmin family of Ujjain. As a boy he was very inconstant and negligent of his studies. His mother felt grieved that he should be so negligent of his studies and she felt that she could exercise very little control on this daring spirit. The fact is the boy used to wander alone amidst the wild place of Nature as the mood led him. At times he used to wander along the banks of the river Sipra ; at other times he was to be found in a lonely cave or by the side of a big tank on the bank of which there was a Siva temple. On one occasion when he was severely scolded by his mother for his dare devilry and neglect of his studies the boy set fire to his clothes and besmeared himself with their ashes and appeared before his mother wearing only a loin cloth. When she saw him in the guise of a Sadhu she burst into laughter. Probably by this form of play-acting he gave vent to his future plans and intentions.

On an auspicious day Pitambar was invested with the sacred thread and the usual rites were performed. He was then nine years of age. It is obvious that no definite plans can bind the spirit of one who is born with a definite purpose in life. A few days after the sacred thread ceremony the boy who was the only hope of his widowed mother left home for good. He left home without anybody's knowledge for an unknown destination. The mother who was afflicted and disappointed prayed earnestly to Siva, the presiding deity of Ujjain. As for the boy he fell into the clutch of a cunning fellow whom he met on the way. He took away the golden ornaments which the boy had received at the time of initiation on the plea that they might endanger his life, and that these ornaments might be left with him for safe custody and that he might take them back on his return journey. After this adventure the younger seeker met a Sadhu on the way and after travelling with him for some time he arrived at the Ashram of Swami Brahmananda, which was situated on the banks of the Narmada at about a distance of forty miles from the town of Baroda. There he sought the shelter of the well known yogi.

Swami Brahmananda was seated calmly before his Dhuni and he kept before him a light which was burning perpetually. The very sight of the Swami kindled the previous Sanskaras in him. As for the Swami, he, too, knew, by his miraculous power, the object of his coming, his name and address. Without asking his name he addressed the boy by his name and assured by his loving smile that he would initiate him on the next auspicious Sravani Purnima day. The Swami then asked the novitiate to procure by begging enough food to feed the visitors at the time of initiation. The boy felt glad at the prospect of initiation but he was hesitant at the prospect of having to beg enough food to feed a large number of people. But the Swami assured him and said that he need not feel diffident; all that he had to do was to have confidence in the guru and to go round with the guru's begging bowl in hand, that bowl had a miraculous quality ; whoever went round with it could collect as much food as was neccessary to feed the inmates of the Ashram and even the visitors could be fed with what is in excess of their demand.

When the auspicious day arrived Swami Brahmananda initiated him as a full fledged Brahmachari ; the injunctions of the scriptures were closely followed and the necessary rites were observed. The function passed off well without any hindrance whatsoever. The guests partook of a sumptuous feast. It was then that the boy came to realize the importance of the guru's miraculous bag. When the novitiate asked the guru what he should pay as Gurudakshina Brahmananda told him that he was not in need of any material-goods but that it would be sufficient if he offered him the fruits of success and that would itself please him very much.

Brahmananda was a great yogi. He was very much loved and respected by the Gaekwar of Baroda and Her Highness Maharani Yamuna Bai. They used to invite him now and then to the palace to spend some time with them, but he would take care to hide from them his real yogic powers. It was under the benificient care of this guru that Balananda began to practise severe austerity within the confines of the Ganganath Ashram. After some months he was asked to undertake a pilgrimage along the banks of the Narmada. In the course of his wanderings he met a very great realized soul named Gouri Sankar Maharaj. He was a very learned man and a reputed yogi and he was closely associated with his own guru. Under the guidance and patronage of this realized soul Balananda led a life of severe religious discipline for several years and at intervals he used to visit the Ganganath Ashram as long as his guru was alive.

In the course of wandering in the company of a Udasi monk he reached a place called Mandal—a place situated on the banks of the Narmada. In addition to his begging bowl his luggage consisted of a piece of cloth, a hatchet, some digging implements, some ganja and a small quantity of arsenic poison. As they were proceeding in their way, the local commissioner who had arrived there in order to investigate some theft cases had them arrested on suspicion that they might be the thieves he was in quest of. His suspicion grew deeper when he found the digging implements and the intoxicants. No argument, however, it might be could convince the commissioner who happend to be a European. He threatened to put them in jail. Their earnest pleading that their implements were only meant for digging up roots to sustain their life had no effect on him. They pleaded in vain that the intoxicants were meant to maintain their body heat during winter months. The commissioner was prepared to believe him on one condition that Balananda should swallow all intexicants. As for Balananda he preferred death to life in jail. He swallowed the whole lot and fell down unconcious. His dying request to the fellow monk was that after death his body should be thrown into the river Narmada. After a while as he was in a semi-concious state, he felt the presence of the presiding deity of the river. In the mean time the son of the commissioner who had just returned from a hunting expeditions, had become a victim of Asiatic cholera and expired before the doctor could arrive. At the request of a local gentleman who had come to meet the commissioner and who was horrified to see the condition in which Balananda lay, the commissioner was persuaded to take a linient view of the case. As the commissioner had become upset at the death of his son there was no great difficulty in persuading him that the doctor should be permitted to attend upon Balananda. Thanks to the unexpected turns of events Balananda was not only cured but also set free. Some times later the same commissioner met Balananda while he was digging the earth to find some roots in order to sustain his life. He felt convinced of the yogic powers of the Sadhus and he wished to offer Balananda some money as a token of regard but Balananda declined the offer with thanks.

While the Sadhus were travelling along the banks of the river Narmada they had convincing proof that they were under the protecting care of the presiding deity of the river. In the course of their wanderings they had to pass by some dense forest. It was evening, darkness had set in to continue its duty after the disappearance of light. As a result of long walk they were fatigued. Moreover they had no food for the whole day. The party decided to spend the night in open air, there was no known habitation near by ; and indeed the party was at a loss as to what they should do next. On seeing a tribal woman standing there with her cows they requested her to procure some food for them so that they might save their lives. The woman replied that they need not worry and that in fact she would give them as much milk as they could drink. They drank the milk that was offered but as soon as it was over both the tribal woman and cow vanished all on a sudden.

Balananda then came to Kamakya on a pilgrimage and here he spent many days in deep meditation on the Mother. On this occasion he fell ill of cholera ; he became quite exhausted and was waiting for the last moments of life, when he was lying in that condition he saw a very beautiful girl shining with divine splendour standing before him. She consoled him and told him that on that occasion his life was safe but She also warned him that he should immediately leave the place. The next morning he merely felt that he was very hungry and after taking his bath he prepared some Kitchury, took the food and found that he was completely cured.

After that episode he came to Tarakeswar and from there he went to many other places. In the course of his peregrinations he reached late at night a place called Jaleswar where there was an old and famous temple which was dedicated to Siva. During his meditation he heard a voice directing him to take his seat on the Panchamundi asana which was near by and meditate there. He sat there in mediation for the rest of the night and when he came out of the temple on the next morning the people who had gathered there were all astonished for none but a yogi could spend the night there and meditate on the Panchmundi asana. He then continued his journey northward along the Himalayas and on several occasions he had visions of divine presence.

The mystic syllables taught by the guru were now beginning to give their full fruits by way of developed psychic power; it was as though a seed had been sown and developing into a full grown tree. In fact his guru had told 'Be like a bee and collect the honey of spiritual experiences during your life time.' With the lapse of time he not only realized the truth of what the guru had taught but was also able to guide others in spiritual matters. The desire to uplift others who sought his help became more and more manifest as the years passed by.

Among his disciples was Ram Charan Banerjee, the the subdivisional officer of Ranaghat. He was also a noted huntsman. As he had cultivated a taste for things western he had little regard for eastern culture. He became involved in some official trouble and was charged with neglect of duty and if the case should go against him he might be dismissed from service. Balananda first met him when he came with a request for a tiger's skin ; he was offered a number of attractive blankets out of which he was free to make a choice ; but he did not want any of them and he went away without accepting any of the gifts from him. But the calm contenance of the yogi had attracted the officer. He now sought the help of the yogi and was saved from the impending disaster. As a result of it his faith in the guru increased very much. Once he underwent an operation for a carbuncle without the use of chloroform and he bore the suffering gracefully by meditating on his guru. After the passing away of Ramcharan Basu, a wealthy man, his wife took the initiative in starting an Ashram for the guru and it was in this way that the Karanibad Ashram or Topovan which is six miles away from Deoghar, was started. There was another disciple of the name of Dayanidhi Jha. He was spending his last years with his son there. One day his son was bitten by a snake and he was overwhelmed with grief. He practically resigned to the inevitable. 'At that time he had a strange vision. He saw some terrible looking form perhaps the messenger of death entering the Karanibad Ashram and Balananda driving it away with a stick. Shortly afterwards his son was saved by a miracle, and as result of it his faith in the guru became deeper and deeper.

During all years there was one person who was troubled very much and that was Narmada bai, the mother of Pitambar who became the renowned yogi Balananda. She prayed to the Lord Siva during all these years. By the grace of the Lord she came to know the whereabouts of her son and after the lapse of forty years she came and met him at the Karanibad Ashram. Balananda was very glad to see his mother after such a long time and he served her to the best of his capacity till the end of her life.

In relation to his disciples Balananda took great pains to advance them spiritually. According to him every disciple should undergo four tests. He called these tests by the name of Garshan, Tapan, Chedan and Taran. In a sense the guru might be compared to an expert goldsmith ; he converts the life of the disciple into a thing of beauty. The term Gharsan means rubbing. Just as the goldsmith rubs the gold on a touchstone to find out its purity the guru ought to find out in the first instance to what extent the nature of the disciple is pure and to what extent it is alloyed. The next stage is Tapan or heating and this is meant to separate pure gold from the dross. The next stage is Chedan or cutting, when the artist removes from the molden mass all that is superfluous in order to release the sleeping spirit of Beauty from within. Thus we come to the final stage of Taran or hitting with a hammer to give the final touch to the finished object. The guru also adopts the similar technique when dealing with his disciples.

Though Balananda was a stern disciplinarian in dealing with his renouncing disciples he was very linient in his dealing with his household disciples. His unbounded love and outstretched benificent arms were always extended to them in order that they too might advance along the path of spiritual growth.

When he was staying in a house at Baranagar in Calcutta, Maharaj Jatindra Mohan, a member of the renowned Tagore family sent him his representative with a request that Balananda should pay him a visit. Balananda replied that people unwittingly called him also by the title of Maharaj and it may not be quite the right thing for one Maharaj to visit another Maharaj and therefore it might be better if Jatindra Mohan should call him personally. He also narrated a story in support of his point of view. There was one monk who had attained high spiritual eminence. He was seated, absorbed in meditation in the middle of a high road, along which the king was travelling. There was as usual a large retinue following the king. The king's followers asked the monk to move out of the way, but the monk remained unperturbed, he showed no sign of moving. He replied that he, too, was a Maharaj in his own way. By the time the king arrived on the scene. In reply to the king's question, as to where his army was the monk replied that there was no need of any army as he had no enemies. He was then asked as to where his treasury lay and the monk replied that there was no need of a treasury as he had no expense. Moreover his kingdom extended over the three worlds. Consequently he, too, was a Maharaj and in no way inferior to the one in front of him. The king then realised the significance of what the monk said, prostrated before him with devotion and departed.

When the story was narrated before Maharaj Jatindra Mohan Tagore, he changed his mind and he came in person to visit the Sadhu and seek his advice on matters spiritual. In reply as to what was that he should do in order to liberate himself from the wordly entanglements the Sadhu replied 'Maharaj, up ulat jayiye i.e. reverse your steps.' When the person to whom it was addressed failed to understand its significance, Balananda explained to him the inner meaning of it. He said that every thing was to remain exactly as it was; all that was necessary was to change one's point of view. Instead of thinking 'All this is mine' one should think 'All this is Thine.' Egoism should be cleansed and be converted into the seat of God. One should give up the idea of ownership; that idea should give place to the idea of trusteeship; that one is the trustee or manager of what is God-given and that one should render service to the afflicted humanity and give true account to the giver of good things of life. Jatindra Mohan felt satisfied with this advice and took leave of the yogi. In this way Balananda used to advise his women devotees also and tell them that they should regard themselves as the maid servants of God.

It was in the year 1906 that his guru Swami Brahmananda passed away in the month of Mag at Ganganath Ashram. Placing his brother disciple Swami Keshavananda as the head of the Ashram he came to Deoghar and stayed at Tapovan. It was to him that Balananda had come as a boy of nine from Ujjain as the gift of Lord Siva. And now on 26th Jaishta, 1937 Balananda himself entered Mahasamadhi and became merged in the holy Siva of Vaidyanath Dham.

JNANDEVA

Vittalpantha was the head or Kulkarni of the village of Appegao near Paitnar situated on the northern bank of the river Godavari. Even though he was a wealthy person he found no peace of mind because he had no children upon whom he and his wife Rakumabai could shower their affection and to whom they could pass on their heritage. Sidhopantha, the father of Rakumabai was the headman of the village of Arandhi. After the death of the father of Vittalpantha he invited his son-in-law and daughter to stay with them to fill the gap of the male issue. In this way two or three years passed away. At the end of the period Vittalpantha, with the permission of his wife left for Benares and there he took Sanyas from Ramananda.

Once Swami Ramananda, a monk of great renown came to Arandhi, he was invited to accept Bhiksha at the house of Sidhopantha. Clad in a red bordered cloth with the vermillion mark on her forehead which is the sign of chaste wife, when Rakumabai appeared before the Swami and prostrated before him to receive his blessings the Swami blessed her and said that she would be the mother of good and honest sons and wished that she should lead a happy life. Any other person in that circumstance would have felt happy. With tears rolling down her cheeks Rakumabai unfolded her tale. Her husband had become a Sanyasin and there was no possibility of the fulfilment of her desire.' Swami Ramananda also came to know that the person on whom he had conferred Sanyas was none other than Vittalpantha, the husband of Rakumabai. The Swami then consoled her and told her that what had come from his lips could never be false. Immediately on his return to Benares he said that he would ask Vittalpantha to go back to his life of a householder and stay in that stage of life for some more years.

Ramananda kept his word. On the renewed assurance of the guru that the spiritual future of the disciple was quite safe in his hands and that the guru had himself taken the responsibility, Vittalpantha was persuaded to go back to his native place and lead the life of a householder. Once again he was at Appegao, his native place with his wife Rakumabai, and in the course of time the guru's prophecy came true and her desire also came to be fulfilled. The hero of our story Jnandeva was born as the second son of Vittalpantha. It was in the year 1271 and, as the astrologer said, the stars were very auspicious. As a result of his previous Sanskaras the boy was endowed with an uncommon genius and a keen intellect. Even in his boyhood he manifested signs of his future greatness. He used to spend his time with the Sadhus, hear discourses on religion and participate in the chanting of hymns from the Vedas and other scriptures.

When Jnandeva was old enough to be invested with the sacred thread Vittalpantha brought him to the holy city of Nasik. It was a virtue of necessity in a sense which brought him here for according to popular traditions one who had become a Sanyasin could not go back to the household life and the village people would not co-operate with Vittalpantha who had broken the rule. Thus it was that the investiture with the sacred thread came to be performed at Nasik. After the function was over the family was going round the Brahmagiri hill on a pilgrimage. All on a sudden a tiger appeared from the forest and it was late in the evening. In the resulting confusion the family became scattered. Nivrithinath, the elder brother of Jnandeva was lost and could not be traced. The fact was that in the confusion he had run away and sought shelter in a cave which happened to be the abode of a great yogi named Gahininath. The yogi kindly invited him to stay with him and in the course of a week he opened before him the great treasure house of spirituality and yoga. After a week he returned home and narrated to Jnandeva and to other members of his family all that had happened. Vittal pantha did not live long after this incident. Thanks to the blessings of his guru the prophecy he had uttered long ago came to be true and it brought him calmness of mind at the hour of death.

It was now the turn of the younger brother Jnandeva to seek the guru. On an auspicious day under the instruction of his guru, Gahininath Nivrithinath initiated him into mysteries of the spiritual life. Like a seed that falls on favourable soil, the disciple was able to benefit by it a hundredfold, for such is the nature of good Sanskaras attained in previous birth. The death of his father and the intensity of social ostracism to which he was subjected made their lives a burden. And it was specially felt by the mother Rakumabai who was besides greatly worried over the prospect of having to find a suitable husband for her young beautiful daughter Muktabai. The two young brothers however sought the opinion of two learned pundits of Paitnar, named Hemarpantha and Bopadeva who were learned authorities on the Dharmasastras and as their opinion was favourable the village people desisted from troubling them further. It was at about that time that their mother Rakumabai also passed away.

On a certain occasion when Jnandeva and other members of his family were on their way from Paitnar to Arandhi they halted for a night in the Nevash monastery. In this monastery there lived an elderly monk called Sachidananda who was incharge of the monastery. The Swami was very ill, he was confined to his bed and was gasping for breath. Apparently the end had almost come. Moved with great pity Jnandeva sat near him, touched him and uttered some mystic syllables and to the astonishment of every one the monk regained his normal health. Nivrithinath, his brother and the guru, however warned him against this misuse of yogic powers lest it should distract the aspirant from the final path of liberation. Moreover the yogic powers should be exercised with the permission of God for kindling spirituality in others only after the realisation of Truth. Nivrithinath urged him to exercise that rare gift in writing a commentary on the Gita so that the whole humanity might benefit by his special gift.

Literature is one of the means of self expression and it was through this channel that his inborn bent of mind found self expression. The work that now flowed from his pen is remarkable for its wonderful similes, its scientific and logical treatment of abstract philosophy couched in beautiful language revealing a rare depth of thought; even the explanatory notes indicate a high ability. It was famous Jnaneswari, the far famed commentary on the Gita. It was completed in the year 1290 at Navesh when its author was just nineteen years of age.

Although the author wrote many other works such as 'Amritanubhava' which is a work based on the philosophy of Siva sutra and a number of devotional 'Abhongs', it is by his commentary on the Gita wherein he dealt with a synthesis of knowledge and devotion, of Jnan and Bhakti, that he is best known. It has brought the author not only an all India reputation but also world fame. It is not only an epitome of Maharastrian devotional literature but it had also inspired subsequent works such as those of Kabir and Tulsidas. What the songs of the Alwars are to Tamil culture and the sayings of Basava to Kannada culture, that the Jnaneswari is, in relation to the culture of Maharastra. The literary genius of Maharastra culture prevalent from the 11th century through 'Paramamrita', 'Vivekasindhu' of Mukundaraj and also through other works of famous writers, took definite shape in the work of Jnandeva in the 13th century. It inspired the subsequent writers. According to R. D. Ranade, the author of 'Mysticism in Maharastra' the three great thought currents of power, devotion and knowledge meet and mingle in Jnaneswari. Jnandeva laid the foundation of the religion of love, Namdeva and other Sadhakas built temple on it and more famous Tukaram shone as the crest of the temple, subsequent ages came to slake their thirst, Sadhakas came to this source and fount of devotion to quench their spiritual thirst and that stream still flows on.

Turning to some of the high lights of this far famed work Jnaneswari one will be pleased to note that the author's regard to his guru is very beautifully brought out in a particular passage where he compares the guru to a monsoon cloud whose beneficient gift of welcome rain is not canalized along particular channels but is for the whole of humanity. He described elsewhere in Abhong 340 the pang of separation from God which the devotee feels indicating the intensity of love and devotion. He said—the moon has lost her coolness for him, for he can no longer find his Ishta; that is the reason why sandal paste cools him not; it burns his body. A soft bed of scented flowers is as hot as charcoal; the melody of song merely makes him feel more keenly the pang of separation. But all this changes after his realisation of God, the pang of separation then subsides. He admitted that he was lame, blind, incapable of achieving anything and was confused in mind. But now he was sitting at peace under the cool shade of Kalpataru, the darkness of mind disappeared and the spiritual light shone upon him. Hereafter there was no need for him to walk along the road guided by his senses. Hence he would like to sing the song of the glory of God; his discontended thoughts have vanished; he was now free to foretaste of immortality; suffering and sin have departed; there was nothing else other than divine bliss. The gifted seer thus became the vehicle through whom the wisdom of the Vedas spoke again. That unwanted ego conciousness which makes one blind to the spiritual reality now vanished for ever. His mind and intellect became attuned to the infinite. He saw every where the glory of Brahman. In that transcendent vision the creation is not different from the creator, the relative is not different from the Absolute. The one alone exists. It is Brahman and nothing but Brahman.

It was now the time for the gifted seer to share with others his insight into the Divine Reality. When he went to the holy temple of Pandarpur, the abode of Lord Vitoba he said that the Absolute has taken form in order to make use of It as a mirror of the Eternal. When God wants to see His face He takes form which is looking glass. The sweet smell of flowers can not be bounded by a rope nor the unbounded sky be bounded. What is essential is self surrender and Ishtanishta. His God-intoxicated Namakirtan drew around him a large number of distinguished devotees. Special mention may be made of Gora, the potter of Teradhokhi, of Changdeva, the noted Hatayogi and of Namadeva, the famous saint of Maharastra. In this distinguished company of which he was the leader he travelled to various places of pilgrimage. Just as a magnet attracts iron filings which in turn become magnetized, his magnetic personality made its influence felt on all who came in contact with him and through them he influenced the spirit of the age.

His life mission was over. In was now time for him to retire. It was the year 1296. He found himself once again in his native place of Arandhi. The wheel had run full circle. He withdrew more and more into himself until finally on an auspicious day he attained Mahasamadhi. With his demise the great spiritual star of the southern sky shot off its axis.

NAMDEVA

Malik Kafur, the army commander of Allauddin Khiliji, attacked Deogiri in thirteenth century or so. Ramdeva Rao, the king of the country could not withstand long before his superior force and had to yield. He was taken prisoner and sent to Delhi, the capital of the Pathan rulers but was released by the emperor after six months. Within three years of his return to Deogiri as the head of a tributary state he died causing a void. The intensity of restlessness, fear, despondency prevailing then in the country was taking away the vitality of the people. It was at this critical period of Maharastra that Namdeva appeared to serve the afflicted humanity. He was born, on an auspicious day in the year 1270, at Narsingpur, a small village near Deogiri to a poor but honest and upright tailor named Damaset. The poor tailor came from a low class. Though he maintained his family with great difficulty from the income of his profession, poverty could not make him abandon his path of truth.

Damaset consulted a local astrologer about the future of his heir and was pleased to know that his son would have a very bright future, that he would live long and acquire vast treasure, not material wealth that could give him some financial relief, but a spiritual treasure that could allay the suffering of innumerable people. Damaset was free from greed, so, though poor, he was happy to learn that his son would not distract from the path of truth.

Unfortunately the prophecy of the astrologer did not prove true at the beginning. With the growth of years the son became a notorious leader of a gang of decoits and a terror to the people. Murder, looting, burning of houses became a profession to him. At this time one destiny-guided incident turned the course of his life.

In order to pay homage to the Goddess on the special occasion of Her worship on the fourteenth day of dark night, a very great number of devotees from different quarters far and near, gathered before Her temple in the deep forest of Ambodhia rarely visited by people on ordinary days. It was an occasion for the poor to see the worship, get some help from the pilgrims or at least the Prasad that was generally distributed after the worship was over. Among the assembled poor there was a lady with a child in her arms. She and her child were without food for two days. She came all the way on foot from the distant village of Padna with a hope to give her hungry child a little food. She was formerly a very respectable lady and had plenty of riches when her husband, a well known military employee of the Deogiri government was alive but after the brutal murder of her husband by some decoits, along with the party of eighty four cavalry, in the deep forest of Ambodhia she became a street beggar. Her condition became worse when her relatives too taking advantage of her helplessness cheated her of all her wealth.

The hungry child in her arms was crying piteously. In the meantime a stranger dressed like a hero came on a horse back to pay homage to the Goddess. He used to come there now and then but none cared to know his where abouts. Disturbed by the piteous cry of the hungry child in the lap of the mother he scolded the lady, saying that this was not a house but a temple meant for undisturbed course of worship by the devotees. When the stranger heard the woeful tale of the woman who was once very rich but then became a street beggar under forces of circumtances he was moved to pity. Not knowing that the stranger was the real culprit when the woman cursed the murderer for causing widowhood to many, making many children orphans and bringing extreme misery to innumerable people, simply to satisfy his greed and sense pleasure his heart began to burn with remorse, because it was he who made many homeless and destitute and it was he who led the gang of decoits on that terrible night in the deep forest when the husband of the said woman was murdered along with the party of eighty four soldiers. In order to wipe out sin heaped by heinous deeds the stranger used to come now and then to the temple of the Goddess at Ambodhia, but on this occasion the pitiable sight of the crying hungry child on the lap of the poor mother, her tears and her curse on the murderer made his life unbearable. He wanted to get rid of the burden of life, he felt he had no right to live and cause misery to others. He must either mend or end, but it was too late for him to mend, he preferred to end himself before the Goddess. Finding no other way out the stranger immediately entered the temple and thrusted a sharp sword on his throat. The blood oozing out profusely like a current from the wound flowed to the altar of worship, and on the body of the image and polluted the temple. The priests and sevaits present on the spot caught hold of him and turned him out. Fortunately the attempt for suicide before the Goddess failed, he did not succumb to the mortal wound and his life was saved by the grace of the God probably for a higher cause. He was granted the opportunity to mend himself for the good of humanity. This stranger was our hero.

This incident changed the course of his life. Repentence burnt his heart, tears flowed incessantly from his eyes, he left Ambodhia for a shelter at the lotus feet of Vittalji at Pandarpur. The tears of the helpless widow removed a dark curtain, opened a new scene for divine sport and caused the flow of devotion in the rocky heart of the decoit. It was in this way that the hardened sinner and notorious decoit of Narsingpur, after coming to Pandarpur became a devout Vaisnava. There he became known as Namdeva. He began severe austerities and meditation on the glory of Vittalji, the deity of the temple. He joined the party of Jnandeva, the famous saint of Maharastra and the author of Jnaneswari, then living there as the head of the band of Sadhakas to preach the doctrine of knowledge and devotion. At the beginning Namdeva could not make much spiritual progress as he did not get initiation from any realised soul without which the gate of spirituality remains closed.

One day after evening prayer he approached Jnandeva for initiation, Jnandeva assured him that there was nothing to fear as shelter at lotus feet of God does not go in vain, when time is ripe God will certainly favour him. He also advised Namdeva to approach Bisoya Khechra of Barsigram for initiation, who would open the spring of love for him. Instructed thus by Jnandeva, Namdeva hurried to Barsigram for his cherished initiation and appealed to Bisoya Khechra for his grace. Finding that the field was ready for sowing the seed of spirituality Bisoya Khechra blessed the new comer with the favour of initiation and encouraged him to continue his practice of meditation untiringly till the goal was reached. That the blessing of the guru came true in the life of Namdeva who after initiation practised severe austerity at Barsigram is evident from an Abhong (song) of Bisoya Khechra describing the God-intoxicated condition of his disciple. Returning from Barsigram Namdeva met Gora Kunhar, another inspired contemporary of Jnandeva and was advised by him to remain merged in the ocean of bliss all the time.

After some time Namdeva joined the pilgrims' party of Jnandeva who, along with Gora Kunhar, Sambat, Bisoya Khechra and other devotees of his inner circle visited important places of pilgrims. Jnandeva did not live long after this so the void left by his immature death was filled up by Namdeva. He preached the glory of God for half a century and served the afflicted humanity. Thus the Bhakti movement started and cemented with knowledge by Jnandeva watered by Namdeva and afterwards by Tukaram was established firmly on the sound basis of love. It brought not only an awakening in the people of Maharastra, but also in the whole of south and west India. His special stress on devotion appealed to all irrespective of caste and creed.

One night after singing the glory of Vittalji in the court-yard of the temple Namdeva sat for food consisting of two pieces of bread and a little curd. In the mean time a dog appeared there from some unknown quarter and ran away with the pieces of bread. Namdeva, God-intoxicated as he was, felt Gods' presence in every being, ran after the dog with the curd pot and entreated it to wait a little with patience and take the bread with curd. He felt that his chosen deity had come to him in the form of the dog.

Namdeva had miraculous power. Janakibai, one of the famous female composers of Abhong (song) next to Muktabai, the sister of Jnandeva, mentions about it. It so happened that once when continued heavy shower for days together was about to flood the temple of Vittalji, Namdeva began to sing the glory of God and dance. To the wonder of all the terrible flood which inundated other areas subsided near the temple. This miraculous feat spread his reputation far and wide.

While working as a labour in some building construction Choka, a member of the inner circle of devotees of Jnandeva and a pious untouchable humble poor brick layer of village Sangli, fell along with other labours under the wall that gave away accidently and was crushed to pieces. The devotees wanted to bring his remains and inter it at Pandarpur but they could not identify his body. When they asked Namdeva as to the means of detecting his dead body he advised that every bone lying under the debris should be taken near to ear, that the bone from which the song signifying the name and glory of Vittalji would be heard should be taken as the bone of Choka. Afterwards the devotees succeeded in detecting the bone and interred it at Pandarpur.

Namdeva became famous for his Abhong (song of the glory of God). The ideas expressed in those songs bespeak of the depth of his devotion. He wrote—As boys playing on kite do not bother about twain but keep their eyes on the kite, as women carrying on waterpots one upon another keep, while walking their mind fixed on the pots, as unchaste women always think of their lovers wherever they be, as thieves think of other's gold, as misers think of their hoarded wealth, so a man should always keep his mind fixed on the meditation of God whatever his profession may be. He is the cause of his own misery. Sour seeds do not yield sweet fruits, water does not flow from powdered stone (92).

A man should not be blind with the horror of the effects of misdeeds. Illegal love brought death of Vasmasura, caused moon to suffer from Tuber-culosis and Indra from thousand holes in his body (102). He should try to lead saintly life. Saints act as washerman in building spiritual life, besmear the mind with the soap of consciousness, sweep it on the washing stand of perseverence and wash it on the pure current of knowledge. He can claim to be a true lover to whom honour and disgrace, friend and foe, gold and clay are same, he is pure, a yogi. (114)

The power of God realisation is unbounded. He is graceful, It is He who gives strength to the work, guides the new born calf in the forest to suck the mother's udder, teaches the new born serpents the trick of biting. Pour as much milk and honey in the sour creeper, its fruit will be bitter, cut sugar cane into any number and then chew it, the sweetness in it still remains. (135)

Time was ripe for Namdeva to return to the lap of God whence he came. In the year 1350, he merged in Mahasamadhi at the age of eighty. His demise left a void in the heart of the seekers of truth.

TUKARAM

Pandarpur is a very holy place. The beautiful temple of Vittaldeva (a form of Vishnu) stands on the bank of the holy river Bhima. People assemble here for a bath before entering the shrine. On festival days the deity is beautifully decorated with flowers and is taken round in procession while groups of devotees follow and sing the glory of God. The whole atmosphere is then surcharged with spirituality.

Among those who witnessed this splendid scenes of mass fervour Tukaram was an interested spectator. He was not aware of the time when Pandurang which is another name for Vittaldeva had taken his seat in his heart; all that he knew was that whenever he took part in these public acts of devotion his heart was at peace. At another time he felt a great gulf of separation between himself and his chosen ideal. Thus it was that he was very eager to realise his chosen ideal, his Isthaveva, Vitoba. On a festive occasion after having participated in the day's activities when he was taking rest under a tree, tired and happy he had a wonderful dream. A Vaisnava saint appeared before him; while he was still in the dream stage the saint initiated him, blessed him and vanished. According to some the person who appeared before him in his dream was none other than a great soul of Chaitanya line; but according to others it might have been one Satchidananda, the disciple of the renowned Maharastra saint Jnandeva. It was a rare experience. Tukaram felt overwhelmed. While speaking of that experience he used to say that the guru is all knowing and that the guru alone knows what is good for the devotee. That dream brought about a great change in his life. Henceforth his whole life was dedicated to God realisation. The initiation which he had received in his dream was like a boat which meant to carry him accross the sea of Samsara, to eternal life beyond. By the grace of Vitoba he had secured a seat in the boat.

Tukaram was born circa 1598 A. D. in the village of Dehu which is about eight miles away from Poona. He was a Vaisya by caste. His father was called Bohalba and his mother was Kanakbai. Both of them were devotees of Pandurang, the presiding deity of Pandarpur. As Sahoji their eldest son did not evince any keen interest in life, the business interest of the family had to be looked after by Tukaram. Tukaram was twice married; after the passing away of his first wife Rukmabai who died of Tuberculosis, Tukaram married again. Jijabai was the name of the second wife.

Tukaram led a care free life till he was eighteen years of age. After the passing away of his parents a period of tribulations set in. Moreover it was a period of terrible famine all over Maharastra. Tukaram's business failed and he was unable to meet his creditors. As Jijabai came of a rich family she was able to help him to some extent; and with a loan secured from her relations she set him in business once again. Tukaram was not meant to be a successful businessman. He was too tender-hearted to compel those who took on credit to pay their dues in time and the more unscrupulous among them forgot to pay. Once only fortune favoured him in his business deal and he came home with a large sum of money, resolved to meet all his obligations. On the way however he saw a poor Brahmin, fettered, being led away by his creditors. Tukaram forgot his business interest; he relieved the other man in his misery and when he returned home he had to put up with the scolding of his wife and the insult of his creditors. It was all the play of Vitoba, for He was making His devotee a fit instrument to receive the divine grace; for it is obvious that no man can serve both God and the Devil at the same time. Tukaram was thus weaned away from the secular life and was led step by step to a life of renunciation. Tukaram preferred a life of the solitude and he took his abode in a cave at Vambanath in order that he might devote himself entirely to a life of meditation.

Once Kannafya, the younger brother of Tukaram rescued, after great effort their claim to some ancestral lands and with great glee brought the document to Tukaram. Tukaram was not in need of any secular property and he threw away the document so that it might float down the river. In this way Tukaram spent days and nights singing the glory of God. One day a cultivator took it into his head that it would be a very good proposition to engage Tukaram who was always on the hills to watch his crops but in the practical affairs he could not see why the birds which fell on the crops for food should be starved when God has provided them a plentiful harvest and what happened next might well be imagined. When the matter was reported to the Panchait court he was insulted and punished for negligence of duty.

Whenever there was any Namkirtan or Harikirtan in the temple Tukaram was always in the forefront. He also rendered personal service by keeping the temple premises clean for the benefit of the devotees, he used to remove the pebbles from their path. Without caring for praise or blame he used to render personal service by fanning them.

Tukaram was dedicated to the service of God and of His devotees, he was not interested in anything else. Thus as years rolled by he became more and more introspective and he spent his time in the meditataion of Vitoba and in singing the songs composed by Jnaneswar, Namdeva and Eknath. The Abhongs (songs) of Namdeva appealed to him. He wished to compose Abhongs but he did not do so at the beginning for lack of mastery over the language. It thus happened that on one moonlit night when he was on his way to Pandarpur he had a vision of Vitoba who commanded him to compose some Abhongs after the manner of Namdeva. That was the beginning of the unfolding of the poetical talent which lay hidden in him and he composed numerous songs in praise of Sri Krishna.

In the course of time as the fame of Tukaram spread round numerous admirers and fellow devotees gathered round him. Special mention may be made of a few of them such as Gangadhar Pandit, a pious Brahmin of the locality, Santoji Teli, a Vaisya of charitable disposition. At the same time it evoked also the malice of not a few. Among the later class the most notorious was Mumbaji Gossain, an influential Sudra of Dehu, for while the followers of Tukaram increased his own followers decreased in number. Mumbaji used to frequent the Namkirtan parties of Tukaram not with a view to spiritual edification but with a view to find flaws. On one occasion when Tukaram was on his way Mumbaji set upon him and severly belaboured him. As Tukaram was deeply absorbed in the thought of God the physical discomfort went almost unnoticed. Later on when he found that Mumbaji was not present in the Kirtan party he went to him, commiserated with him on the pain suffered by him while beating him and requested him not to give up attending the Kirtan. This act of vicarious atonement so affected the evil doer that from that time onward he became a changed man appreciated his greatness and completely surrendered to Tukaram.

We are also told that on one occasion a Brahmin prayed to Pandurang that he might be pleased to lead him to light which lies beyond all darkness ; and in response to his prayer he heard a voice from within commanding him to proceed to Jnaneswar and pray at the tomb of the Sadhu. There he heard a voice commanding him to proceed to Dehu and seek the guidance of the great devotee Tukaram. Tukaram received him with affection and he composed some Abhongs by way of instruction and presented him a cocoanut. It is said that the Brahmin went away dissatisfied leaving Abhongs as they were composed in Maharati and not in Sanskrit. It was however reserved for another Brahmin named Kondaba who collected it and found plenty of gold in it. The present, it is said, was donated by a wealthy devotee to Tukaram after repeated failure to make him accept any gift, Tukaram was very indifferent to all these affairs.

In those days religion was supposed to be enshrined only in the sacred language which is Sanskrit. Maharati had not yet become a respectable vehicle of the religions. The local Brahmins proceeded in a deputation to the house of Tukaram and almost persuaded him to destroy his Maharati Abhongs and Tukaram foolishly yielded to their persuasion and threw it away in the river. But he began to repent almost immediately for the songs were evoked by Vitoba, they were dedicated to the Lord and they were not his private property. And therefore by way of attonment he fasted for thirteen days. At his earnest entreaty Vitoba appeared in a vision and told him that the songs were not lost and that he would recover them if he should dive under the river at a particular spot. He then dived into the river Indrani and found that the manuscripts remained uneffected althongh they remained immersed in water for a long time. It is said that Rameswar Bhatta of Mumbaji who was jealous of him for bringing out social revolution by love and Namkirtan and who conspired with the local zamindar to drive him out of the village and who persuaded Tukaram to throw away his manuscripts into the river, scolded him right and left for ruining the sanctity of the Sanatan Dharma through his Abhongs and Namkirtan. When he was attacked by a dangerous disease he found that there was no cure for it. To every action there is equal and opposite reaction, he was paid in his own coin. Thereupon he sought out Tukaram and requested him to intercede on his behalf and in this way he became cured in body, mind and soul. Liberal hearted as Tukaram was he forgot the behaviour of Rameswar and embraced him.

There is no rose without thorn. Tukaram was the rose in the garden of God and Jijabai was next to the rose, its near neighbour she was not satisfied with the indifferent attitude of her husband. Tired of her torture Tukaram took shelter in a forest to meditate on God without any disturbance. In defence of her it may be said that the task of looking after home and of educating the children fell upon her. When she felt the higher call she called upon Tukaram and requested him to return home. She assured and promised before her husband that she would not stand as an obstacle to the religious practice of her husband whose tie of Samsara was slackened by God's grace. Tukaram returned home but before long the old trouble began ; and one day she took a piece of sugar cane and she hit her husband with it until it broke into two. Tukaram remained unexasperated. He merely smiled and said that they were in need of two pieces of sugar cane. Jijabai was not alone, for the wives of other devotees also felt that their husbands were neglecting their worldly duties under the influence of Tukaram. Thus the wife of Sivakeskar of

Lohagaon one day took it into her head to pour a pot of boiling water on the head of Tukaram. Although his skin was burnt under the impact of scalding water his mind was uneffected and he asked others not to ill treat her.

On another occasion when Tukaram was absorbed in the meditation a poor woman of Lohagaon came to him in distress for her only son was dead. She wanted that her son should be revived and if he were not revived she roundly declared that she would call Tukaram and his religion a fraud. Tukaram did not wish the glory of Vittalji should be thus assailed. He prayed to the Lord and the dead came to life.

Among those who were attracted by the reputation of Tukaram mention may be made of Shivaji. After the victory of Tarantha fort Shivaji was dreaming that he would establish a Hindu kingdom; he came to Tukaram and sought his blessings. Tukaram sent him to the great saint Ramdas. Ramdas was then living on the bank of the river Krishna; but providentially he had come to Pandarpur and the meeting took place at the shrine of Vitoba. Tukaram was thus the initiator and Ramdas the great organiser of the spirit of religion which lay behind the great Maharata empire.

The spring season of the year 1650, brought with it as usual a revival in the life of nature. Trees put forth new leaves, birds sang, the river Indrani produced murmuring sound and Tukaram also felt that the great call for which he was awaiting had come. His life's mission was over. When God is realised what else is there that remains to be realised. 'Whenever I caste my glance I see the vision of God and I see His manifestation everywhere. I am in Him and He is in me. Everything merges in the Absolute, the ocean and the waves are one and there is no creation, no disslution, Atman alone exists, there is neither sunrise nor sunset in Atman—thus sang Tukaram and in this song he gathered the whole of his life and passed among the immortals. Thus Dehu is a place of pilgrimage for it enshrines the mortal remains of the great saint Tukaram, the inspired singer and devotee of the Lord.

RAMDAS SWAMI

There lived a Brahmin named Suryajipantha in the village of Jambu near Bir Pargana on the north bank of the river Godavari in the Maharastra country. His wife was known as Ramabai, she gave birth to a beautiful son with good traits in him in the year 1609 A. D. As both the husband and the wife were devotees of Sri Ramchandra, they gave the name of Ramdas (the servant of Ram) to the child. At the age of seven Ramdas was invested with the sacred thread and as the years advanced he grew in the way ordained by the Sastras. In the course of time the relatives of Ramdas arranged his marriage. The officiating priest who was learned in the lore of the stars said to the parties concerned 'Be careful.' All that he meant was they should be careful to keep the Muhurtam (auspicious moment). Ramdas however interpreted it differently. It was, he thought, a divine warning uttered to him against entering the labyrinth of Samsara, for the deeper one goes the the more difficult it becomes for one to get out. It was as though God had ordained that he whom He had destined to a great future should not be lost by contact with the world. Ramdas felt that he had come to the world for a different purpose ; he did not wish to lose the peace or happiness that comes to those who renounce the world.

No sooner did these thoughts arise in his mind than he ran away from the marriage pavilion unmindful of what was to happen to his parents and other relations. Suryajipantha was insulted by the bride's party. He tried to persuade Ramdas to change his views but Ramdas was adament. He said to his father that he was under no obligation to take food mixed with poison. The ignorant may persue a married life and imagine it to be a life of pleasure; they may awake and find themselves enveloped in grief. But the marriage is not for one who knows the futility and transitoriness of the world. He therefore prayed to his father that he might be spared from being entangled in Maya but help him to realise his Istha, Sri Ramchandra. When the father noticed the unshaken Vairagya of his son he returned home sadder and a wiser man; and his son was free to practise a life of Tapasya in order to realise life's supreme goal.

Ramdas practised austerity for long and he was blessed with the vision of Sri Ramchandra. It is said that on one occasion he came to Pandarpur; here Sri Krishna is enshrined in the temple; but Ramdas meditated on Ram and he was blessed with a vision of Ram for the Lord bestows His grace upon the devotee in the form of his Istha. Ramdas then went on a pilgrimage to the various holy places in India preaching the glory of Ram and the efficacy of Ram-nam. Finally he settled at Mahabaleswar, built a temple and worshipped Ram in the image.

In this way the reputation of Ramdas as a great soul spread far and wide. As he wished to meditate in peace he took his abode in a cave in a neighbouring hill. Among the many distinguished persons who came in quest of Ramdas was Chhatrapati Shivaji. On failing to find him in the temple he sent his men in various directions to find out the great soul. On an auspicious day Shivaji met Ramdas at a holy place on the bank of the river Godavari and sought initiation from the saint. The guru however knew that Shivaji was destined to achieve something different. His mission in life was to establish a Hindu kingdom which would be a bulwark against the iconoclasts and the assailants of Hinduism. He told him that as a mark of his favour he would grant him a token with which he could gain success in his royal mission. Whenever Shivaji was in trouble he used to meditate on his guru or seek him in person in order to receive his advice and blessing.

On one occasion the Mogul emperor came to attack the kingdom of Shivaji but thanks to the guru's encouragement and blessing Shivaji fought with renewed vigour and was successful in beating back the enemy who left the field after suffering great loss in men and money.

Several miracles are attributed to Ramdas. It is said that on one occasion he saw a large number of people suffering from thirst and the saint out of pity for them dug the hard barren soil about a foot deep and from it clear water flowed. They quenched their thirst and prayed to God for the welfare and longivity of the saint.

Ramdas knew by his yogic power that his mother was on her death bed. He paid a hurried visit and she welcomed him with great affection. He told her "I have come to seek your blessing for I know that I may not see you tomorrow." After the passing away of his mother Ramdas returned to his place and devoted himself to meditation. He also wrote several works. The most important of them is Dasbodha. His Manachi-sloka or address to the mind where he desires that he might, like the sandal wood wear himself out in service admirably brings out his social philosophy. Ramdas passed away in the year 1681 A. D. Shivaji built a shrine over his mortal remains and installed the image of 'Anjurai' which is worshipped to this day at Sajjangarh.

SAAI BABA

A young Fakir with his head covered with a piece of cloth and with another piece of cloth round his waist and having the appearance of a mad cap was seen moving aimlessly all day long hither and thither. His eyes however were bright and penetrating; with his eyes half-closed he was absorbed in thoughts of the supersensuous which transcends the mind. He lived in the big hole of a Neem tree, accepted only such food as came unsought and he lived the life of a recluse cut off from all contact with society.

As years passed by the people of the village of Siridih in Ahmedabad district, for that was the place where he lived, came to realise the extraordinary charm which he concealed behind his austere life. Although they became gradually acquainted with him all that they knew was that he was practising spiritual discipline sitting in the hollow trunk of the tree. They did not know who he was and whence he came. After some time he changed his abode on an auspicious day; hence forth he lived in a delipidated room in a mosque. Here he used to keep his Dhuni burning before him. People used to gather round him, discussing religious topics hours together. As was usual on such occasions they used to smoke Ganja and leave late at night. One night the discussions centred round the various miraculous powers of the Sadhakas. The audience was interested and there was no sign of weariness on the part of young speaker but what astonished them was every time the lamp began to flicker for want of oil he poured some water from his water pot and the lamp became re-illumined and blazed brightly.

It was in this way that the fame of this miracle working Sadhu spread all over Siridih and in the course of time all over Ahmedabad. An unending stream of visitors came to him from different quarters, they came from all strata of society. Among them there were Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsees, learned ones, government officials and high dignitaries. In his presence they forgot their ranks and dignitaries and felt at peace with themselves and the world. They came to him either to seek some cure for physical malady or to find some consolation that religion offered from the ills of life. At times he would distribute ashes from his Dhuni and it had the miraculous power of curing various ailments, of restoring the sick and making them healthy. Like a skilful musician he who liberates the sleeping spirit of song by playing upon strings of his musical instrument, he played with human nature, its joys and sorrows and its latent aspirations. He poured upon them his love, his blessing and his power of healing; and like a monsoon cloud it descended upon on all alike irrespective of caste, creed or religion for it is not canalized along these narrow channels which are of man's making.

And now as if at the waving of a magician's wand the scene changed. The mad cap who lived in the hole of the Neem tree played an apparently different role in the amphitheatre of life. His torn rags were replaced by gorgeous dresses and like a king he sat in Durbar and received the homages of his devotees. There was a large concourse of people from far and near who vied with one another in heaping presents upon him. His entourage consisted of the aristrocracy, of wealth and culture, they thronged in thousands, they heaped valuable gifts upon him. He was now the refuge of many, was highly respected by the elite of the society. He was taken round in a silver palanquin under the splendid canopy of a golden umbrella surrounded by a large crowd of admirers carrying silver sticks in their hands. The carpet that was spread before him when he began his daily round of life as an humble beggar was filled with presents. They ranged from rare and delicious food to thousands of rupees as well as silver and gold coins; but he did not keep any of it for himself; he gave it to the poor and the needy. In the afternoon he would leave the precints of the mosque, beg for some simple food from some householder and be satisfied with a loaf or two of coarse bread, perhaps with some curry. It was in this way that he spent his daily round of life.

There are a large number of episodes related of this wonder working Fakir. A few of them are narrated here. Once Narayan Govinda Chandorkar, alias Nanasaheb who was a pious, intellegent Marati Brahmin and who was holding a high office in the financial department of the government, found himself while on duty on the top of a parched and barren looking hill. He was too tired to move from that place; he tried to procure some water but all attempts proved futile, at last in sheer despair he sat down on a stone along with his companion. By chance he happened to notice a tribal man there and he asked if he could get some water to drink. The tribal man told him merely to push aside the stone upon which he was sitting; for below it there was a cavity for the collection of rain water. After drinking to his fill when he turned round he found to his astonishment that the tribal man had suddenly vanished and no trace of him could be found on the hill. A few days later when Nanasaheb met Saai Baba at Siridih he enquired if he (Nanasaheb) found water to drink on that hill on a particular summer day and Nanasaheb wondered how exactly the Fakir could know of the incident.

By the blessing of Saai Baba many a woman had her lap filled with the desired progeny. Among them special mention may be made of a person named Santaram Balwant who was blessed with a virtuous son named Kaluram. The child thus born led a pious life devoting his life in the worship of Krishna. He was able to foretell what would happen in future. He died early hearing Jnaneswari and worshipping Saai Baba in his photo. Afflicted persons used to flock round Saai Baba seeking remedies for their diverse ailments. At first he would scold them, but before long his innate gentle nature would come to prevail and out of abounding grace he would give some ashes from his Dhuni and that was sufficient to cure them whatever might be the nature of ailments. There was one Bhimaji Patel of Junar village in Poona district. He was a Tuberculosis patient. When all other remedies failed he was brought in a palanquin and placed before Saai Baba. At first the Fakir was wroth but he was moved by the piteous cries of the patient; he took some ashes from his Dhuni and rubbed it over his forehead. The patient was saved miraculously from impending death. Bilwan, the son of G. S. Karparde fell a victim to an attack of plague; his mother requested Saai Baba's permission to leave the place for the safety of the boy but Saai Baba replied that there was nothing to fear; when black clouds come it is only in order that crops might grow, after a while the clouds disappear. And so it happened in this case also. After a short time the boy was completely cured. It was the year 1916. Bitta Rao desapande appeared before Saai Baba with his old grand father who had become blind on account of extreme old age. Apparently all treatment had failed to give any relief and they were in great distress. Saai Baba besmeared some ashes from his Dhuni on his eyes and assured him that he would be cured very soon and before long his prophecy came true.

Saai Baba's grievance was that though many people came to him in quest of material wellbeing and success very few approached him in quest of spiritual well being or real knowledge which alone can bring peace. He knew what people wanted and he offered them what they sought. His method of teaching was peculiar. On one occasion Mrs Mangars was sitting close to his Dhuni. She perceived a terrible looking leper with a very dirty cloth round his waist and he was carrying in his hand a very dirty bag with some food in it.

Her first reaction was unfavourable. She thought that she would feel immensely relieved if the beggar should leave the place immediately. This reaction in her mind did not escape the attention of Saai Baba. He picked up a little food from the leper's bag and he not only partook of it himself but also gave it to her. Although the food was not clean she could not refuse it in the circumstances ; it is needless to say that no harm came to her as a result of it ; and for her she learnt the great virtue of humility. It was in this way that he cured her of her sense of pride.

Once B. V. Dev, a disciple of Saai Baba desired his presence at some festival which he was holding at his house. Saai Baba too agreed to be present on the occasion. On the appointed day he attended the function along with two of his friends, but they came in the disguise of ordinary Sadhus and so complete was the disguise that the person who was holding the festival could not at all distinguish them from the rest. Saai Baba did not wish that his devotees should develop the pride of wealth ; far from it, he wished that they should treat every one with equal respect. It was this teaching which Saai Baba wished to impress upon his devotees specially Nanasaheb and his wife. They had to promise that they would strictly adhere to that dictum and that they would never ill treat any one. But when in actual practice they broke the rule Saai Baba was angry and warned them not to break the rule in the future. Next to humility Saai Baba taught his disciples the supreme virtue of surrender to God and he also taught that one should have regard for one's guru. At times his disciples were subjected to severe test in order to see how profound their faith in their gurn was.

Saai Baba had a large following drawn from all classes of society. Among them there were Hindus and Muslims, Brahmins as well as people drawn from the lower classes ; but irrespective of their social status they loved and revered him. The reason for it was that his love was unbounded. A touching incident of this nature is narrated by B. V. Narsingh swami. On one occasion during the celebration of the Ramnavami festival at Siridih there came a very old woman to see Saai Baba but the crowd was so great that she could not come near him and she wept. Her weeping did not fail to draw the attention of Saai Baba and he asked some one to bring her near him. When she was brought before his presence Saai Baba showed great affection towards her and he accepted the bread that she had brought even though it was unfit for eating.

On one occasion a thief was caught by a police and in order to save himself he entangled Saai Baba in the police case. Although the police did not arrest Saai Baba for fear of public opinion, a commission was sent to take his statement and to charge sheet him if necessary. After thorough enquiry in the village it was found that Saai Baba was innocent of the crime. This enquiry saved the situation. Sometimes the innocent and the guilty are mixed up ; the reason for it is mysterious. At times Saai Baba used to warn devotees against impending danger. On one occasion he warned a Hindu devotee not to enter the mosque precint.

Saai Baba belonged to all. He had among his disciples eminent persons such as Mulu Sastry of Nasik and Sri Narayan swami of Vamanmath. It was difficult to say whether Saai Baba was a Hindu or a Moslem. He lived in a mosque which he called Dwaraka Mai. He kept a Dhuni before him and a light always burning before him and next to the altar he used to keep a Tulsi plant. He had both the Hindus and the Muslims as his disciplies. This diversity of life which we see among men extends lower down among the animals also. Even in the canine world we see how some are well fed, well cared for and brought up in palaces whereas there are others left neglected and we see how they fight in the street for a piece of meat. At every stage of life sorrow and happiness are to be found and according to Saai Baba they are the results of actions done previously.

Be that as it may, it was time for the Fakir to take leave of the world of men. For nearly two weeks he was confined to his bed and a Brahmin was chanting by his bed side some prayers from the scriptures of the Hindus. It was in this way that the Fakir attained Mahasamadhi on 8th November, 1919.

RAMANUJA

Some say that dreams are false and they have no semblance of truth. There are others who opine that some dreams specially those that have a divine content are prophetic in nature; for such was the experience of the learned savant Asuri Keshavachari of Sri Perambudur. On the occasion of a lunar eclipse he had come with other pilgrims to have a bath in the sacred Kairavini and later on to worship Sri Parthasarathi at the shrine. He prayed to the Lord that he might be blessed with a virtuous son; he had been married and he had been childless. As the Lord was pleased with his devotion, He appeared to him in a dream and assured him that he would have a son of uncommon genius who would flood the world with religious thought and change the current of life.

Within a year after the auspicious dream, in the year 1017 A. D. to the joy of the parents the family was blessed with a child. Such was the birth of Ramanuja who brought about a revival of religion not only in south India but over the whole country. The Bhakti movement started by him and the philosophy of Visisthadwaita as taught by him influenced the later thinkers such as Nimbark, Vallabhacharya and Sri Chaitanya. In him two currents of religious life one of spiritual knowledge and activity as inherited from his father Keshavachari and the other of devotion as inherited from his mother Kantimati meet and mingle.

From his boyhood Ramanuja showed signs of extraordinary genius. Even as a student he had felt great attraction for Tiru-Kacchi-Nambi (Kanchipurna of Punamely) an ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu who is worshipped as the Lord

Varadarajan at the shrine at Vishnu Kanchi. Kanchipurna's deep faith in God and strength of character left the impression in the mind of the people that God manifested His glory through this dedicated soul. There was however one obstacle to be overcome. The boy belonged to the Brahmin caste whereas Tiru-kacchi belonged to the fourth caste ; but this obstacle was over ruled by him that sacred thread alone does not make one a Brahmin and what is essential is real devotion to the Lord. Low birth is no bar to the attainment of devotion ; it is supported by facts ; because an untouchable like Tiruppan became an Alwar (Vaisnava saint) and is worshipped even by the Brahmins now. The simplicity and devotion of Ramanuja who was exceptionally brilliant and in whom signs of future greatness were visible, attracted attention of Kanchipurna and he could not refuse the invitation of the boy who wished to serve him. The boy according to him was like fire under cover of ashes. Ramanuja married at the age of sixteen but within a month of his marriage his father died and the joy of the family disappeared shortly.

As Ramanuja was interested in the study of Vedanta he approached a noted teacher of Advaita Vedanta Yadavprakash by name and became his student. The teacher liked his pupil very much specially for his extraordinary merit and devotion but soon his affection began to decrease. Gradually it turned into zealousy ; when the pupil's popularity was definitely pronounced in the assembly of the local king it became acute. It thus happened that the daughter of the king was possessed by an evil spirit and Yadavprakash was called for in order to cure her by his ritualism but he failed ; when his young student Ramanuja touched her by his feet she became free from the influence of the evil spirit. Because of this miracle the name and fame of Ramanuja spread throughout the country. The suppressed zealousy of the teacher took a definite shape. Very soon there arose a fundamental difference of opinion between the student who was a devotee and the teacher who was however book learned. Thus it was when the teacher came to a passage in the Chhandogya Upanishad 'Kapyasam Pundarikaksham' there arose a sharp difference of opinion as to the exact meaning of the word 'Kapyasam'. And as time advanced their difference became even more pronounced. That was the beginning of trouble. Disgusted very much with his pupil Yadavprakash scolded him and turned him out. But this disturbed his mind very much and the peace of mind disappeared. Lest he was exposed because of this he brought his pupil back by sweet words. Thinking that the dualistic philosophy of his student might one day shatter the foundation of his monistic principle Yadavprakash conspired with some of his other students to kill his future opponent in secret in the Vindya forest on their way to pilgrimage, but the plan was soon upset. Ramanuja fled away at the advice of his cousin Gobinda who was also a student under the same teacher and who overheard the conspiracy. Thirsty and very much exhausted as Ramanuja was by long walk in the forest tract he fell in a swoon. On waking he found himself being attended by a hunter and his wife. At night fall when the attending huntress felt thirsty Ramanuja fetched water from the nearest well. After quenching her thirst she and the hunter disappeared in the twinkling of an eye. When he found on enquiry in the morning that he was near the temple of Varadrajan at Kanchipuram he was overwhelmed with joy and tears flowed incessantly from his eyes out of gratitude to God who saved him miraculously ;

thus by the grace of Varadrajan he had a narrow escape. One whom God favours finds oneself safe from trouble. The storms might rage outside he was like one who has taken shelter in a strong edifice.

Without finding Ramanuja in the party of the pilgrims Yadavprakash took it for granted that he was certainly killed by wild animals. But returning from the pilgrimage when Yadavprakash came to know that Ramanuja had reached home safely he realised that his conspiracy had been foiled. Thinking that probably Ramanuja could not know anything about his plan, though wounded for his own misdeed he showed sympathy for his pupil and invited hlm to join the study group again. Ramanuja too did as desired by his teacher as if nothing had happened. This had a great lesson for him. His devotion for Varadrajan became deeper and he served the deity daily by fetching water for the Abisheka of the deity.

There was at that time a well known Vaisnava scholar named Yamunacharya. He was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu and the worshipper of Ranganath; he lived at a place far south at Sri Rangam. When he came to Kanchi and visited the tol of Yadavprakash he recognised the latent greatness of young Ramanuja and invited him to come to Sri Rangam and take his place there as he was too old. Before his death he nominated Ramanuja as head of the Vaisnavas and sent Mahapura to bring him to Sri Rangam. When Ramanuja came there he was grieved to see that the master had passed away, but he had three wishes which remained unfulfilled, and for this his three fingers remained closed and Ramanuja who could miraculously know them promised to fulfill them all. He promised that he would educate the devotees of Vishnu on Dravida Veda, protect them who would take shelter under the lotus feet of God Narayan and designate a Vaisnava into the valuable lore of Parasara who composed Vishnu Puran to preach the glory of God but the most important of the promises was that he should write a commentary (Sri Bhasya) as it is called which gives an authentic exposition of the Vedanta Sutra of Badarayana according to Visisthadwaita cult. According to this school the difference between the Jiva and the Lord is self evident and salvation lies in surrender to the Lord Vishnu as Narayan.

On returning to Kanchi Ramanuja wished to be initiated by Tirukachhi Nambi although he was a Brahmin by caste. Later on it was agreed by common consent that Ramanuja should be initiated by Mahapurna who had come all the way from Sri Rangam. Ramanuja also mastered Tiruvaimizi which consists of four thousand stanzas composed by various Alwars (devotees of Vishnu) and which though it couched in the Tamil language is considered to be as sacred as the Vedas in Sanskrit ; for what purifies a language is the spirit that sanctifies it. By this time there arose a difference between Ramanuja and his wife. Her outlook was narrow due to the influence of tradition and was bound within the framework of caste system. Ramanuja invited his guru Mahapurna and his wife to stay in his house so that he might find opportunity to serve his guru with great devotion. Ramanuja's wife was self centred ; she felt that too much religious attitude of her husband spoiled her household carrier ; she thought that Mahapurna and his wife were responsible for her husband's indifference towards her ; her jealousy towards them became acute. On a simple pretext she picked up some quarrel with his guru's wife in the absence of her husband at home and managed to drive them out from home. Reaching home Ramanuja fell from heaven as it were at the sad news that his guru had left their house for good. Ramanuja felt unhappy at the haughtiness of his wife and wished to get rid of her. On a different occasion when a poor Brahmin was driven away from home by his insolent wife his patience failed and he decided to leave home. He devised a plan to send his wife to her father's house and he succeeded. Thus torn between devotion to God and his domestic life Ramanuja renounced all his earthly possession in favour of his wife and received Sanyas direct from Lord Varadraja. He was now free to devote himself entirely to his life's mission. His spirit of uncomprising devotion and of sacrifice for a great cause came out in a different way also.

After Sanyas Ramanuja was known as Yatiraj. His extraordinary merit, learning and purity attracted love from all. He was selected as the head of the Kanchipuram monastery and he spared no pains to discharge the duties entrusted upon him. His name and fame cemented by vast learning and devotion spread throughout the country specially in the south. Charmed by his spiritual magnetism, learning and devotion earnest seekers after truth came forward to become his disciples. Thus the well known Vedantin devotee Dasarathi and Kuresh, a wealthy landlord and savant accepted his discipleship. Yadavprakash, his former teacher as said before, misbehaved and plotted against his life. Commanded by a divine being in a dream to beg pardon of Ramanuja and become his disciple when Yadavprakash approached his former disciple he was received with great honour and granted Sanyas. His name was Govindadas, he accepted the philosophical doctrine of his former student that Brahman is Sabisesh, the receptacle of all qualities from whom the universe evolves and that the being (jiva) who is a servant of God does not merge in Brahman in liberation and that service to Him brings peace and bliss and that deviation from Him is misery. Under the instruction of his young guru Gobindadas wrote a book entitled Yatidharma Samuchhaya, an authentic work on Vaisnavism assuring lasting peace.

The winning over of the great Vedantin Yadavprakash brought a new chapter in the life of Ramanuja and his name and fame spread throughout the south. Sri Rangam monastery was specially interested in this new leader and wanted to install him as its head as desired by Yamunacharya but the sad incident of Mahapurna's coming away from the house of Ramanuja was an obstacle and they doubted whether he would at all agree to come to Sri Rangam and accept the offer. Mahapurna who was specially very eager to bring his disciple to Sri Rangam, sent, under the divine command of Sri Ranganath, Bararanga, a great devoted musician to do the needful with the permission of Varadraja. He succeeded. When Ramanuja reached the new monastery with his disciples and accepted its responsibility he attained two supernatural powers by the grace of the presiding deity of the temple; that by the first he could remove the human misery and by the second the devotees could be maintained. He created, by dint of his devotion, a spiritual atmosphere which the devotees from various places took share. He studied Gitartha Samgraha, Siddhitraya, Vyas Sutra under his learned guru Mahapurna.

Under instruction of Mahapurna he approached, for further study, Gosthapurna but was refused eighteen times. This repeated refusal made Ramanuja despondent but at last at the request of an elderly disciple he agreed to initiate Ramanuja on the condition that he should come alone only with his Danda and Kamandulu (staff and water pot). But Ramanuja appeared with his two disciples Dasarathi and Srivatsa. Charged by Gosthapurna for non-compliance of his order Ramanuja explained that the two disciples were his Danda and Kamandulu. Such a deep love for the disciples charmed Gosthapurna so much that he initiated him with the most powerful mystic word with the grave warning not to disclose it to any body as according to him whoever knows the significance of the mystic word would surely go to the abode of Lord Vishnu. After initiation Ramanuja did just the opposite. Under intoxication of godliness he entered a Vishnu temple, uttered the same mystic word before all so that they might enter the gate of Vaikunta which was open for them and where liberation was guaranteed. Though his guru taught him the sacred Mantra which conveys liberation on condition that he should not reveal it to anybody Ramanuja wished that all should share with him the joy of liberation and he taught to all the sacred formula "Om, Namo Narayanaya—salutation to Narayana." The guru was displeased and threatened him even with hell for misuse of the spiritual power entrusted on him, but Ramanuja thought that it was a small fee to pay if so many others could be saved; he did not mind for his eternal hell if it could grant eternal heaven to others. It is said that his guru was so much pleased with his earnestness and generosity that he blessed the disciple wholeheartedly. Mahapurna formerly got his son initiated by Ramanuja. Gosthapurna, too, followed the same and got his son initiated by Ramanuja. Not satisfied with this he declared among his disciples that the philosophy expounded by Ramanuja should henceforth be known as Ramanuja Siddhanta as in it the real philosophy of Vaisnavism is exhibited.

After learning the true significance of Vaisnavism from Kanchipurna Mahapurna and Gosthapurna, the three well known disciples of Yamunacharya he received instruction from Maladhar and Bararanga, the two remaining disciples of the same guru. Thus by the completion of the course of training the spiritual currents of the five got mixed and turned into one and this made him the uncontested powerful leader of the Vaisnavas in the whole of south India. People regarded him as the second representative of Ranganath.

The name and fame of Ramanuja curved the influence of the chief priest of Ranganath. In order to maintain his position he plotted to kill his enemy with poison in the food for which he invited Ramanuja in his house but by the grace of God he was miraculously saved because of the disclosure of the plot by the wife of the priest. Failing in this he attempted second time; he gave some offered drink mixed with poison but glory to the grace of Lord Ranganath the drink turned into beverage and increased the tempo of God-intoxication in him so much that he began to dance with joy with hundreds of devotees and his eyes half closed and body beaming with divine light as if his existence was merged in Ranganath, the presiding deity of the temple. The priest who was waiting to hear the death news of Ramanuja was totally disappointed. He whom God favours is always safe whatever the nature of the trouble may be, because he has taken shelter in a strong edifice. The priest then began to repent for his misdeeds, fell prostrate before his feet and begged pardon of him repeatedly. Ramanuja blessed him and advised him to worship God sincerely and serve humanity. Thus by the grace of Ranganath the deadliest enemy turned into a close devotee by the power of love and devotion.

Yajnamurti, an Advaita Vedantin of great fame on a tour of cultural conquest in the south came to Sri Rangam. In the scriptural combat with Ramanuja he argued for seventeen days and refuted all the arguments put forward by Ramanuja. Finding no other way out of the difficulty he prayed fervently to Ranganath to save him from defeat and remove the difficulty that stood on the way of establishing the glory of Vaisnavism. By a miracle the mind of Yajnamurti changed; he found in Ramanuja not only an encyclopaedic lore but also a spiritual genius with love devotion and humbleness. He submitted to Ramanuja and became afterwards known as Devarajamuni throughout the south. He was the author of Jnanasara and Prameyasara.

Ramanuja was very cautious in training his disciples. He wished that they too should become living examples of devotion, renunciation and humbleness. In order to remove the pride of learning which is an obstacle to spiritual realization he prescribed, for Dasarathi who wanted to know seriously the significance of Vaisnavism and the true interpretation of the Gita, a new method and advised him to work as a cook for a definite period in the house of the recently married daughter of Mahapurna in a distant village. After six month's stay in the manner directed by the guru he accepted the disciple very kindly and instructed him on the desired subject. On a different occasion while touring on a pilgrimage with his disciples he halted at a village called Astasahasragram. In that village he had two Brahmin disciples named Yajnesh and Varadachari, one rich and the other poor. He sent words through his disciples that he would accept hospitality at the house of Yajnesh who out of joy neglected his disciples. Hearing this Ramanuja refused to accept hospitality at his house and went to the house of poor Varadachari who had then gone out for begging. Finding no other way out of the difficulty of serving the guru and his party his wife Lakshmidevi decided to sell her beauty to one rich neighbour who was very much addicted to her but never succeeded to get her consent, in exchange to get the necessary thing to avail the golden opportunity of serving the guru and his party. Everything passed peacefully. When she reached the rich neighbour to keep her words and give him the prasad of the deity which she carried with her, a great change came in the mind of the rich, he fell prostrate to the feet of the poor Brahmin lady, begged pardon of her repeatedly and requested her to take him to Ramanuja through whose grace the villain in him turned into a pious Vaisnava.

While staying in the house of his maternal uncle Sailapurna he was very much glad to see the spirit of service in Govinda who had saved his life against the plot of Yadavprakash in the Vindya forest tract and who without caring his own safety put his hand in the throat of a poisonous snake to pluck out a thorn from inside he brought Govinda to Sri Rangam initiated him into Sanyas and gave him the name Manmatha or Emar. From his name the monastery found at Puri is called Emar math.

He lived at Sri Rangam with his discpiles such as Dasarathi, Kuresh, Sundarbahu, Yajnamurti, Govinda and others and taught them Tamil Prabandam (Veda). After this he set to write commentaries (Sri Bhasya) of the Upanishads, Gita and Brahmasutra. He took the help of Bodhayana Bhasya which was available at Sarada in Kashmir but was never allowed to be taken outside. With the help of Kuresh who followed him to Sarada and committed it to memory Ramanuja revived the contents of the same Bhasya and wrote commentaries of the scriptures. In them his philosophical doctrines are fully described.

The fame of Ramanuja as a teacher of religion came to be established ; disciples gathered around him. His Gadyatraya, a compilation of three prose works brings out the Ramanuja Siddhanta or the philosophy of Visisthadwaita. Fame brought with it also persecution. The Pallava king of Kanchi was a Saiva. Krimikanta, a Saiva king was a great hater of the Vaisnavas. Once he sent for Ramanuja to establish his philosophy before all. Knowing the evil intention of the king, Kuresh in order to save the life of his guru appeared in the assembly of the king in the guise of his guru ; he was punished for his failure to establish his philosophy ; he became blind but he bore no grudge against the king rather he was happy that he was able to save the valuable life of his guru. He came to Sri Rangam. By the grace of God and his guru he recovered from blindness.

There are two distinct portions of the town of Kanchi one is known as Vishnu Kanchi and the other as Siva Kanchi. Each section had its royal patronage and what ever was king's religion happened to be the dominant religion. Thus it was that Ramanuja found himself an exile from home but it was not without compensation. The king of Belur near Mysore happened to be a Jain. His name was Bittideva Raya. Ramanuja converted him to Vaisnavism and he came to be known as Vishnuvardhan though his queen Santaladevi continued to follow Jainism. Thus it was that Ramanuja came to a place called Tiruvarayanpuram which is about thirty miles from Mysore. He wished to renovate the temple of Vishnu. While the Vigraha in the Mulastanam or Sanctum Sanctorum was in tact the Utsava Vigraha which is taken out in procession was missing. Ramanuja found out by his yogic power that it had been plundered and taken to Delhi. After arduous toil he regained the image and had it installed. It is said that the local Harijans helped him to hide it in times of danger and in token of remembrance the Harijans have been allowed temple entry from very ancient time though it was confined to select occasions.

Thus it will be seen that Ramanuja was a devotee, a man of action and a social reformer. Within the long span of life he fulfilled the promises he had made at the time of the death of Yamunacharya. He created a band of Vaisnava followers who by their spirit of renunciation and spiritual acquisition maintained the tradition and culture propagated by him. When his end was drawing near he at the earnest request of his followers gave permission to make an image of his self which he himself installed for the satisfaction of his followers. It was at Yadavgiri otherwise known as Melkote near Mysore where the shrine of Tiru Narayana stands that Ramanuja passed away at the ripe age of one hundred and twenty five in the year 1137 A. D. He wrote the Gita Bhasya and the commentaries on the Upanishads and the Brahmasutra in conformity with the teachings of Bodhayana Sutra. His philosophy stands midway between the absolute monism of Sankara and the absolute dualism of Madhwacharya and has therefore come to be known as Visisthadvaita or Qualified Monism. The Lord is regarded as the one Reality and the world as qualifying the Lord as adjectival in nature which has no existence apart from the Substantive, the One Ultimate Reality. The followers of Ramanuja who are known as Sri Vaisnavas regard him as the incarnation of Laksmana. His philosophical doctrine remains ever bright and it is followed by innumerable people.

RAMANANDA

There is some amouut of truth in the statement that the appearance of Alwars and Acharyas like Ramanuja, Madhwacharya and other saints helped the development of Bhakti cult in the south very much. Gradually it began to spread in the north. The dynamic personality responsible for increasing its sphere of influence was Ramananda, the founder of Ramanandi sect. It was he who established a link with this southern current and make it flow widely in the north in every sphere of society for the benefit of humanity at large. The spiritual force and liberalism of this renowned saint left a great mark in the religious history of India. Most of the religious teachers in the mediaeval age were more or less influenced by this noble soul. Among them Kabir, his direct disciple, Tulsidas, the author of Ramcharitmanas are well known. Nanak, the founder of Sikh religion, Dadu and the Vaisnavas Sadhakas of Gour (Bengal) also could not escape the influence of his cult.

Ramananda was born in 1299 A. D. at Malkote, once a famous centre of Saivism near Prayag, Distrsct Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh but a well known place of Vaisnavism after the the conversion of its people by Ramanuja into his cult. His father Punya Sadan was a pious learned Brahmin well versed in scriptures and his mother Sushila was equally a pious lady like her husband. The handsome boy was named Ramdatta by his parents. After his initiation into the sacred thread ceremony he was sent to the local Sanskrit Chatuspati and by dint of his extraordinary merit and genius there he earned the special attention of his class mates, professors and also of his neighbours. Believing that the boy was endowed with God-gifted genius, friends and relatives advised Punya Sadan to send his son Ramdatta, for higher study, to Benares, the treasure house of every section of learning so that the boy might be a mastermind to glorify his parents, village and the country. Though proud of the merit of his son the consideration of his tender age made the father hesitant at the beginning but when the boy mastered many intricate religious subjects at the age of twelve he was highly pleased to send the boy to Benares for higher study.

Ramdatta was studying under an experienced Acharya in some Sanskrit Chatuspati at Benares and became very favourite to his Acharya by dint of his merit and devotion to God and sincere service of the Acharya. Bath in the Ganges, meditation on God, chanting of the devotional hymns from scriptures, plucking of the flowers from gardens for the worship of the deity, study and service of the Acharya formed part of his daily routine. An incident during this period of student life changed the course of his life. While plucking flowers for the worship of the deity in the early morning from the neighbouring garden of a monastery without the knowledge of the owner he was caught red handed and charged for stealing the flowers. Ramdatta denied the charge and boldly argued in defence of his action that plucking flowers for the worship of God can not be an act of stealing but when he found that there was no way to escape from the garden boundary and the owner was none other than Raghavananda, the well known Acharya of Ramanuja sect he fell prostrate to the feet of Acharya. Raghavananda then assured him of his safety, enquired from him where he was living, what he was studying and under whom he was studying. The Vaisnava Acharya knew from the first sight the future of the boy disciple who would play a great role in establishing the glory of God through Vaisnavism but finding that the boy would be short lived, said 'all your study of the Smriti and commentaries are of no avail as the oil in your lamp is almost exhausted. Under the circumstances it is advisable that you should dedicate your life to the cause of Lord Hari.' Directed by God as it were to save the boy from the imminent grasp of death he asked Ramdatta to send immediately to him his professor under whom he was studying. His professor who was well versed in astrology knew also the short longivity of his favourite student. But he was helpless, he entreated Raghavananda to save the boy by his yogic power and he handed over Ramḍatta to his guru who initiated him and gave the name Ramananda. It is said that Raghavananda saved his young disciple by his spiritual power. In order to make him fit for preaching the Bhakti cult of Ramanuja among the masses Raghavananda taught him Visisthadvaita specially for some years and the disciple also showed active interest in the path of devotion chalked by his guru.

In order to test the depth of the religious practice and fitness of the disciple who now became very learned, popular and persevering, Raghavananda one day asked Ramananda to gain some experience as a Paribrajaka so that he might hereafter be a powerful instrument for the preaching work.

At the command of his guru Ramananda wandered on foot from north (Kashmir) to south (Kanya Kumari) from west (Guzrat) to east (Gangasagar). In the course of this itinerary life he practised severe austeries at Badrinath, discovered in God-intoxicated mood the Sadhan pith of the great sage Kapil at Gangasagar where he, with the help of the people built a temple in honour of the presiding deity. This place has now become a place of pilgrimage, lakhs of people assemble here for bath in the sea specially on the last day of month of Poush. After several years when Ramananda returned to the monastery he was received with great affection by his guru Raghavananda. As said before the guru had educated him properly to hand over the charge of the monastery to this favourite disciple. But man proposes and God disposes. Some of the zealous brother disciples of Ramananda stood on his way to become the head of the monastery and complained to their guru that the choosen head did not deserve the honour as he had not maintained the traditional purity of the sect during the period of Paribrajaka life. There was another fundament difference between other disciples and Ramananda who preferred to introduce liberal views instead of sticking to the old dogmatic sectarian rules regarding food and drink which, according to general tradition, are said to be spoiled by touch and sight of others. Unless the tradition is maintained the organisational solidarity would be broken. Ramananda had to pay severely for his liberal views, he was expelled from the monastery by his guru. Raghavananda loved his disciples very much and admired his liberal views as they were based on the depth of thought, faith, experience and truth, but he found no other way to maintain the tradition. He knew that the firmness of the disciple would certainly bring him innumerable following in no time so he blessed Ramananda from the depth of his heart and permitted him to preach the truth according to his belief.

Taking leave of his guru and the brother disciples Ramananda left the monastery that very day. The blessings of his guru proved true. He started preaching freely. Within a short time a religious sect called Ramanandi sect was formed. He gave special stress on practice of indifference, Tapasya ; he silenced his opponents by his keen intellect with quotations from scriptures in support of his doctrine. According to him whoever takes shelter of God irrespective of caste and creed and devotes his time exclusively to the service of God, need not bother about caste distinction and whoever would follow this doctrine will enjoy equal status in the society. The restriction regarding food and drink was abolished, he abolished many rigorous customs introduced by previous Vaisnava Acharyas. He kept the gate open to all (c/o Macliff, history of Sikh religion Vol 6, P 108). As a result of his preaching, the people of the neglected and depressed class in the society became conscious of their right to worship God and practise spirituality. They responded to the divine call and tried to get rid of the social ostracism which drained their vitality. In the eyes of God all are equal.

His choosen deity was Ram, the incarnate and the hero of the great epic Ramayan. He gave special stress on the repetition of God's name. By it alone one can attain the goal which is liberation. The influence of Buddhism and Jainism was greatly curtailed due to his liberal preaching ; his depth of knowledge of the scripture, personality and keen intellect silenced the atheists. He did not leave any record of his preaching work but Sukhananda and Kabir, his disciples left wonderful records of Vaisnava cult. He used the spoken language, mostly Hindi. His liberal preaching attracted people of different strata of the society. Among them Kabir came from a Muslim Jola (weaver) family, Dhananandа from a Jat family, Ruidas from a cobler and Senananda from a barber family. Pipaji, the king of Gangron, Rajputana, was leading the life of luxury and sense enjoyment. Once the family Goddess of the king advised him in dream to take shelter of Ramananda for his spiritual welfare. Accordingly Pipaji went to Ramananda who, in order to test the depth and devotion of his would be disciple ordered him to jump into the nearby well. When Pipaji was about to jump he at the instruction of Ramananda was saved by the other disciples of the guru. Pipaji was afterwards initiated and given the name Pipananda.

With the blessings of his guru Raghavananda Ramananda became the leader of a new liberal devout Vaisnava sect. After preaching his doctrine for a sufficiently long period he felt that it was time for him to take leave of the world. In the year 1410 Ramananda entered Mahasamadhi at the age of 111 to the great sorrow of his innumerable disciples, devotees, admirers and contemporaries.

DADU

On the eighth day of the bright fortnight in the year 1545, a great soul was born of a humble parentage. The scene was a cobbler's home; according to all social standards the coblers belonged to the humble and lowly and they were deprived of the traditional education and culture which are open to the richer and more respectable classes of the society. Dadu, the child that was born amidst these lowly surroundings continued to lead, during his early years the usual course of life that was open to him and before long he came to be a skilful worker in leather. Apart from that we know very little of his early life except that his father's name was Lodi and that his mother's name was Basibai. We also know that as a young man he married a girl named Howah who presented him in the years to come with four children. Apart from this we know very little of his life of younger days. Probably he must have lived a life of hardship and toil.

The poverty and the environments might keep back for some time the inborn noble traits but they could not altogether repress the accumulated benefit of the Sanskaras of his previous lives. They came to a head in the fulness of time in an apparently causal manner.

When Dadu was working in his room on a rainy day it was a lucky chance that brought to him a very famous soul named Kamal who was the son and disciple of the famous saint Kaḅir. On account of the incessant rain Kamal stood for a while at the entrance of the house of Dadu. Although repeatedly requested to come in, Kamal did not come in. Dadu thought it was because he was a low class cobbler; but Kamal explained that he did not wish to disturb him at his work and reduce his meagre earning. Kamal was finally persuaded to enter the room and Dadu placed before him a piece of leather for that was all he could offer by way of a seat. As soon as Kamal sat on it, tears rolled from his eyes. He remained in a mood of prayer with his eyes half shut. When Dadu requested him to explain the significance of it

Kamal replied that it was because he could not serve the Lord with that whole hearted devotion with which Dadu persued his chosen task. Kamal told him that the Lord is every body's Lord, that He waits with unbounded eagerness to meet and play with His devotees and he also told Dadu that the Lord can be known and realized by one who is sincere, pure and is filled with divine love.

It was an auspicious moment in the life of Dadu ; it looked as though the Lord had been waiting almost at the portal of his heart. All that was required was the touch of a great soul; and all at once Vairagya (indifference) came upon him and he felt the great call of the spirit. Like the water of an artesian well which lies deep below the rock, just waiting to be released ; the touch of the Mahatma released the spring of spirituality which lay hidden deep within his personality. Thus it was that Dadu became a wandering Sadhaka and went on pilgrimage to holy places such as Benares, Behar and practised Sadhana as recommended by the various schools of thought.

It is said that by virtue of the Sadhana which he practised he earned great reputation and came to be regarded by the Nath yogi as a highly advanced soul in matters of spiritual realization. In the course of pilgrimage he visited Bengal also and he was impressed by the Nath yogis of Bengal.

In the course of perigrinations Dadu arrived at Sanvar near Rajputana and there he lived a life of austerity for some time and many disciples gathered around him. One of his special characteristics was that he always lived by means of his physical exertion. At the same time he depended upon God for every thing. He used to say 'Ramnam is my daily food, my profession and my livelihood and it is by His grace that my whole family is maintained' Dadu did not believe in caste distinctions and that was the reason why he had both the Hindus and the Muslims among his disciples.

He held temples and mosques in equal reverence. He used to say that the sun, the moon, space, the earth, wind and water are all busy in serving Him in every one without distinction and that they do not belong to any group or party. When he saw how the people of Guzerat used a special kind of musical instrument he introduced it for the propagation of devotional songs. It was on the holy festival day that a famous singer Bakna came in contact with Dadu and felt inspired by his love of God; and his life came to be transformed by contact with this holy man.

During the latter part of his stay in Rajastan it is said that on one occasion there was fierce draught and that the country was threatened with starvation and famine. The local people approached Dadu to intercede with God on their behalf. As a result of his fervent prayer to God there was a heavy downpour of rain. On a different occasion in the course of a big festival food ran short and the people requested him to save them from ignomy; but as a result of their prayer the food offered to his Istha turned into plenty and all were fed. He used to say adopting the homely simile of the poor that love of God is the needle, meditation is the thread and the body of man is the rag to be patched and worn by the yogi from birth to birth.

The news of the great soul of Amber reached the ear of Akbar, the emperor of Delhi and he was eager to see him. Dadu said to the messenger sent by the emperor that there was no particular business which invited him to Delhi and even if he went to Delhi the emperor might not recognize him.

Afterwards it was decided that they should meet in some lonely place near Fatehpur Sikri. It is said that the religious discussion between them lasted for forty days and that the emperor went back greatly pleased. It is said Dadu refused to accept any material help from him. Although he lived at Jaipur he did not meet the king of Jaipur. After staying at Amber, Marwar and Bikanir he arrived at Narayanpur.

Among the disciples of Dadu some were Sanyasins, some were Nagas and some were house holders. Thus it was that while his Hindu disciples composed a Sangeet grantha to popularise his teachings ; one of his Muslim disciples composed a similar work. The main tenet of his teaching is the love of God and separation which the devotee feels from God. With the lapse of time his mind remained immersed in God as he turned away from the world his song takes a deeper tone of triumph.

The culmination of this life came on the eighth day of the dark fortnight in the month of Jaistha in the year 1606, when at the age of fifty nine he passed into Mahasamadhi surrounded by his disciples from various parts of the country.

The depth of love for God and the intensity of his spiritual acquisition can be found in the beautiful sayings of Dadu. He says, "This body is my scripture ; herein the Merciful has written for me His message." "Words shower when spouts the fount of intellect ; but when realization grows there music has its seat." "When I look on creation as beauty of form I only see Form and Beauty. When I look on it as life everywhere I see life. When I look on it as Brahma then indeed is Dadu at a loss for words, when I see it in relation, it is of bewildering variety. When I see it in my own soul, all its variousness is merged in the beauty of the Supreme soul.

These eyes of mine then became the eyes of Brahma and in the exchange of mutual vision does Dadu behold Truth." "Neither death nor life is He ; He neither goes out nor does He come in nor sleeps nor wakes nor wants nor is satisfied ; He is neither I nor You, neither One nor Two for no sooner do I say that He is One I find us both when I say there are Two I see we are One. So, Oh, Dadu, rest content to look on Him as He is in the deep of your heart and give up wrestling with vain imagings and empty words."

KABIR

Kabir is said to have been born in some remote village near Benares. Neither the date of his birth nor his parentage could be ascertained properly. All that we know precisely is that he was brought up by an elderly Muslim weaver who was his foster father and it was he who gave him the name of Kabir. Kabir was early apprenticed to the profession of his foster father and he earned his living as a weaver. In the course of time he married and had a son named Kamal. Tradition has woven a strange story round the birth of Kamal. When Kabir was walking along a road he heard a number of jackals howling with glee at the prospect of devouring a corpse which lay near by ; when he wished to save the corpse from the jackal by bringing it to the river bank he saw the fish jumping at glee at the prospect of food ; it is said that Kabir decided to revive the boy and bring him up as his own.

Kabir was successful in his profession ; whatever money he saved after meeting his expenses he gave to the poor. As he was naturally of a religious temperament he sought early in life a guru who would help him on his chosen path. He approached the distinguished Ramananda in quest of a guru but Ramananda did not initiate any one other than Brahmins. Although Kabir felt disappointəd he would not take the refusal. Kabir knew that Ramananda was in the habit of going to the Ganges for his daily bath. On a dark rainy night Kabir laid himcelf flat on one of the steps. When Ramananda's foot accidentally trod over a human body he cried out in anguish 'Ram Ram'. That was sufficient for Kabir; for he had received the contact of the guru and received Ram-nam. He then got up and prostrated before the guru and thanked him for the Mantram.

On returning home Kabir shaved off his beard wore a garland of Tulsi beads round his neck and put on the sectarian mark of a Vaisnava. Kabir's mother and wife felt distressed at the change of garb which meant a conversion to the Hindu faith; and they complained to the Muslim ruler of the place. Kabir told them that he was neither forcibly converted nor was he mad. Kabir was summoned to Delhi to explain his conduct. When he was led in the presence of the emperor he appeared in Vaisnava dress and to the surprise of all he declined to bow low before the emperor. He said that he would not bow down to any one except his Ishta Ram. The emperor felt insulted and commanded that he should be imprisoned. The humility with which Kabir endured tribuilation and his religious fervour made the emperor change his mind. The emperor set him free, allowed him to practise and preach freely whatever religion he chose.

When people complained to Ramananda at having taken a Muslim as his disciple he invited Kabir and asked him for clarification. Kabir explained to him the incident at the bathing ghat. Ramananda was pleased with his devotion and openly accepted him as his disciple. Of the twelve disciples of Ramananda Kabir came to be known as the foremost. As he was gifted with a keen intellect also he made rapid progress in the study of the Hindu sacred books. He used to discuss with the guru whatever dispute arose. On one point however there was keen difference of opinion and neither would yield, that was regarding caste system and as a result of it he formed a non-sectarian group which came to be known as Kabirpanthi and the followers of this sect are to be found even now in such far apart places as Bomboy, Cuttack, Benares and Puri. There are at present twelve monasteries attached to this sect, the largest of which is at Benares.

Kabir was in a sense a social reformer for he was concious of the ills of society and strove to remedy them. In those days as now the so called learned classes were lacking in culture and the so called lower classes were making money in crooked ways. Seeing the miserable conditon of the society which pained him so much he said that the Brahmins donot study the Vedas and become devoid of Vedic knowledge; the Sudras take their place, the cheats live comfortably, the honest people starve, chatse women have no cloth to wear whereas the prostitutes have plenty to waste, people have no respect for the learned, the hypocrites are at the top of the society, the milkmen wander from house to house at lanes to sell their milk whereas the wine dealers sell their stock from their own place.

In order to encourage people in the path of realisation of God he used to say life is a battlefield, one should not leave the field; senses, lust, greed, anger etc are deadliest enemies, they should be mercilessly dealt with and be brought under control by good behaviour, truth and the name of God; when a hero jumps in the ocean of life long struggle all his weakness disappears.

He practised austerity with great devotion. After long such practice he realised the goal of life which is the touch of God. Describing this he said 'I can not describe this joy, the song of eternal music rings in my ear, it is like the expected meeting of husband and wife, the master and the servant become one in the eternal spring'. He also said' 'I am the dog of Ram, I am tied up with the string of the name of Ram, I am to go in whatever direction he drags me by the string, I live with whatever he procures for me.

The Dohas or two line verses of Kabir in which he pours out love of Ram are justly famous. He is best known by his Bijak wherein he discusses his religious doctrine. In Ramanandaki Goshti and Goraknathki Gosthi he explains the points at dispute which he discussed with the celebrated teachers of religions.

Kabir is said to have passed away at the village of Magar near Gorakhpur. At the death of Kabir there arose, as in the case of Guru Nanak, a dispute among the Hindu and Muslim followers as to whom the Guru belonged. It is said when the shroud was removed there were only flowers which the two groups shared among themselves. The fact is that Kabir was a mystic who went to source and fount of all religion. It is only when the mystic spirit cools down that it leads to sectaranism. Kabir said in one of his poems 'I shall prepare ink by burning this body and my ribs for pen I shall write the name of Lord Ram and with the light of my life I shall see the face of my Istha; Oh Lord, either vousafe me the vision of your radiant self or grant me death'.

It was as the result of such earnest longing and emotional sublimation that he attained at long last the vision of the Lord and he described in beautiful verses his God intoxicated vision of life. It is in the nature of spiritual consumation. He bids other aspirants to follow the path with the spirit of a hero in battle. Kabir not only touched life at the high water mark of devotion but he also he knew life in its many aspects, grave and gay. He was at once a saint, a poet, a social reformer. He saw life steady and saw it whole and that was the reason why a kindred spirit Rabindranath Tagore has translated a hundred of his poems into English. Kabir is best known through his poems he said "If we say He as only within then the whole universe is shamed : if we say He is only without then that is false. He whose feet rest alike on the sentient and on the innert fills the gap between the inner and the outer world".

"I close not my eyes, stop not my ears, nor torment my body. But every path I then traverse becomes path of pilgrimage, whatever work I engage in becomes service. This simple consumation is the best".

"In this body is the garden of Paradise : herein are compressed the seven seas and myriad stars ; here is the creator manifest".

"In every abode the light does shine, it is you who are blind that can not see. When by dint of looking and looking you at length can discern it the veils of this world will be torn asunder" (II, 33).

"It is because the devotee is not in communion that says the goal is far away" "All see the Eternal one but only the devotee in his solitude recognises Him". (II, 34).

TULSIDAS

The setting sun had almost finished the day's task. The darkness of the evening had spread her thick veils over the earth. Tulsidas had come to a distant place to attend some priestly function. He must return to his native place Rajpur in time. He was walking quickly. When he returned home he saw that his wife Ratna was absent. He wondered what the matter was and searched for her everywhere, he learnt from her neighbours that her father was ill and that she had suddenly left for her parental home. Tulsidas was an orphan. His parents had died early and all his affection was naturally centred on the only person he knew, his wife Ratna. She was besides beautiful and accomplished. Tulsi's life was inextricably interwoven with hers; and he could not live without her even for a short while. The thought of Ratna made him restless. With the single cloth which he was wearing he left at once for his father-in-law's house without minding the impending storm. The heavy rain showed no sigh of abatement. Hail stones fell like bullet, the road was slippery, the dark night was torn by the flashes of lightning and his body was bleeding by the fall of broken branches from the wayside trees. It was in this pitiable sight that he presented himself at dead of night in his father-in-law's house. Every one was surprised at his unexpected arrival. The time and the occasion did not warrant his presence. She scolded her husband and told him that he was merely in love with her physical charms and that if he could only divert his mind to love God with the same intensity with which he loved her he would find himself in a better predicament. She then rudely closed the door upon him and left him in the shivering cold outside.

This was a turning point of his life. From that time he came to love Sri Ramchandra, the Lord of the universe and he surrendered himself body, mind and soul at his lotus feet. When Ratna's door closed upon him Tulsi's heart was opened to receive the Lord within. The abuse and insult he received were a blessing in disguise. It was in that way that the glory of God descended upon him. It looked as though Sri Ramchandra was dragging him from the mire of worldliness to lend the life divine. The call had come but he did not know where he should go.

Years later that young man came to be known as Tulsidas, the famous Hindi poet of northern India. His name was on the lips of all people, for his monumental devotional epic, the Ramcharit manasa. Even the distinguished Vedantic scholar Madhusudan Saraswati appreciated him and said that in the blissful garden of Benares Tulsidas was the visible sacred Tulsi plant, which is so much honoured by the Vaisnavas as the greatest purifier on earth. The portraiture of Ram as the ideal son, brother, king and citizen as depicted by Tulsidas does not have its literary parallel. The beauty of language as well as the method of treatment appeals to all. As a work of devotion it has appealed to all people. The wide popularity of the work is testified by the fact that it had been translated recently into the Russian language.

Tulsidas was born at the village of Rajpur in the district of Banda near Allahabad. He was born in the year 1646 A. D. as the son of Atmaram Divedi, a pious Brahmin of the village. His mother Hulsidevi was also a -pious woman. After the death of his parents at a time when he was still young Tulsidas suffered a life of poverty and tribulaiton. He was brought up by Narsingdas, his father's guru. He loved him and brought him up as his own son and looked after his education. Tulsidas became well versed in the Sastras. At the persuasion of his guru Tulsidas married the accomplished Ratna, the daughter of Dinabandhu Patnaik who was a pious Brahmin living in a neighbouring village. Ratna's beauty at the prime of youth and her charming behaviour pleased Tulsi. That was why he did not allow her to be out of his sight even for a moment.

From his boyhood Tulsi had known that Benares is the hub of Hinduism, that many great souls have lived there and that inmumerable aspirants had sought enlightment from them. Ram-nam was constantly on his lips and with that Mantra he set out for Benares to solve the riddle of life and attain liberation. After reaching Benares with great difficulty Tulsidas took shelter in a Sanskrit tol under the well known scholar Sanatandas who welcomed him with great affection. Tulsidas spent his time in the study of the Sastras in singing and meditating on the glory of Ram. As it was a crowded place he took his abode in a lonely forest on the outskirt of the town. He set out in earnest to realise the goal of life regardless of the physical comforts, food and dress. He was eager to have a vision of his Ishtadeva and he felt a restless longing which knew no intermission. After cleansing the room where he used to meditate every day he would throw away the water at the root of a particular tree. That tree was the abode of a disembodied spirit. One day the spirit made itself manifest to him and offered to help him. Tulsidas begged as a boon that he might be permitted to have the vision of Ram. But that was obviously beyond the capacity of the spirit. The spirit however told him that the Ramayan was chanted every day in the northern part of Dasaswamedh ghat and that every day an old Brahmin came to listen to it and that he could help him for that old Brahmin was none other than Maruti in disguise. At the appointed place and time Tulsidas met him who was otherwise known as Mahavir, the greatest devotee of Sri Ramchandra. At the earnest entreaty of Tulsidas Mahavir disclosed his identity and graciously initiated him into the mystery of Ramnam. That initiation opened out to him a new region of spirituality. That was the highest asset that one could have in solving the problem of life.

Month after month passed on. Tulsi never wasted his time. He devoted all his time and energy to spiritual practice yet his chosen ideal had not blessed him by giving him darsan (vlsion). Unable to endure it any longer he earnestly entreated Mahavir. The guru smiled and asked him to wait patiently for some more time. The Ram Navami festival would fall on the ninth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Chaitra. Maruti told that day he would see Sri Ramchandra with his own eyes in front of his cottage. On the appointed day Tulsi waited patiently in order to have the vision of his chosen deity. There was no sign of his coming and Tulsi felt disappointed. All of a sudden he found in front of his cottage a gipsy couple with a monkey tied with a rope round its neck and an young man standing nearby with a begging bowl. Although they were eager to display the monkey dance for the delectation of Tulsidas he was in no mood for it. He felt angry and closed the door upon them. He groaned in the agony of his heart for the words of Mahavir had not come true.

On the next day Tulsidas complained to the old Brahmin, after the reading of the Ramayan was over, that his prophecy had not come true, he smiled and said that whatever he told would invariably happen. Sri Ramchandra, Sita, Lakshman and Mahavir had all come to him in the guise of a gipsy couple and their party. But the disciple could not recognise him, for his mind had not become purified or illumined by the radiant divine presence.

Tulsidas then began a life of severe austerity. He felt that his body was the temple of the Lord and that his tongue was the portal of it. If he desired to see the light inside and outside he should set the light of Ram nam. After severe spiritual austerity he came to realise that Ram pervades every atom of the creation.

Maruti felt satisfied with the spiritual progress of his disciple. He asked him to proceed to the holy mountain of Chitrakut which is associated with Sri Ram's early existence. Tulsidas built a cottage at Chitrakut, he would bathe in the holy stream and leave on fruits only. In this way he practised meditation for a period of eighteen years. One day Tulsi was as usual preparing sandal paste in order to offer it to the deity during worship. All of a sudden there appeared before him a supremely beautiful boy with matted hair, dressed in birch bark and carrying a bow in his hand, the boy wanted the sandal paste to be put on his forehead. Tulsidas was in a dilemma as to whether he should put on the forehead of the person who appeared before him the sandal paste which he wished to offer to the deity. The incident of the gipsy couple came to his mind ; he was not to miss the opportunity a second time as soon as he put the sandal paste on the forehead of the young bow holder he felt thrilled. His humble request as to the identity of the person whom he saw was answered with a confirming smile ; he knew that it was none other than Sri Ramchandra in person. It was in this way that Tulsidas dived deep into the domain of realisation. A light ineffable spread all around him. After a long time he regained consciousness of the outer world. In the mean time the divine vision had vanished from his sight.

One day Sri Ramchandra appeared before him and commanded him to write the Ramayan in a language which could be understood by people and which could lead them to their upliftment. It was in order to fulfill that command that Tulsi visited a number of places which had been the scene of Sri Ramchandra's exploits, such as the Dandakaranya forest and the banks of the river Saraju. In this way he visited a number of holy places in north India. When he came to Brindaban he found that most of the temples were dedicated to Sri Krishna and Radha. In the shrine of Madan Gopal he prayed that he might be blessed with the vision of Sri Ramchandra bow in hand and his prayer was graciously granted ; for while others saw Sri Krishna, Tulsidas saw in the image the vision of Sri Ramchandra.

After spending time at Naimisharanya forest Tulsidas came to Benares. He lived for a while at the temple of Gopal ; but there arose some difference of opinion between him and the temple priests who were extremely sectarian in their views. Finally he took his abode at Asighat and there he remained till the last days of his life. The place where he performed austerity as well as the place where his mortal remains were laid are preserved even now. It was here that he composed his Ramcharitmanas. It is said Tulsidas at first wrote his works in Sanskrit but at the bidding of Lord Viswanath he wrote it in the language of the people.

On a certain occasion when Tulsidas came to Ajodhya, a great yogi met him and accosted him as the Valmiki of the age. His inspiriration and encouragement helped Tulsidas in completing the Ramcharit manas. In order to carry out his task properly Tulsidas studied the Sruti and the Smiriti as well as the different version of the Ramayans such as the Valmiki Ramayana, the Yoga Vasisia Ramayan, the Hanumatnatak, the Bhagavat and the Raghuvansa and the Uttararamcharit. Tulsidas wrote in a language which is a mixture of the Avadhi Hindi or the Hindi spoken in Oudh and the Brajabhasa and thus set the seal upon what may be called the standard Hindi of later times. His whole work is so popular that the conversation of the common people is frequently interspered with quotation from his works.

Even during his life time the reputation of Tulsidas as a poet, philosopher, devotee and yogi had spread far and wide. Sometimes a large crowd would assemble at his residence to see him and hear him. Reputation, like every other thing has its price, for it makes others jealous. The professional chanters of the Ramayana chose to consider themselves as his enemies for their source of living was threatened. They conspired with a few notorious thieves to steal his precious manuscripts and other belongings at dead of night. When the thieves came at dead of night with evil intent they found an young man bow in hand mounting guard. Overcome with repentance they divulged the whole truth to Tulsidas. Tulsidas in turn embraced the thieves for they had been blessed with the vision of Sri Ramchandra. He told that as the result of merit achieved in previous lives they were blessed in this life and his words brought about a great change in their hearts. We are told that some who were jealous of Tulsidas tried to harm him by Tantric rites but this time also his life was saved by the grace of Sri Ramchandra.

The idea that Sri Ramchandra should mount guard in order to save his earthly belongings was intolerable to Tulsidas. He distributed whatever earthly goods he had among the poor ; and he left his precious manuscript in the custody of a pious Brahmin. Tulsidas then heaved a sigh of relief.

The reputation of Tulsidas as Vaksiddha had spread far and wide ; for they knew that whatever he said would come to pass. One day some one cried piteously before him for in a fit of anger he had killed a Brahmin, for there was no penance short of suicide which could absolve him. Tulsidas felt pity and initiated him into the mystery of Ram nam. The orthodox pundits would not accept such an easy solution. By way of proof they demanded that the temple bull in the neighbouring Siva temple should come to life and eat grass ; and lo, that too came to pass. By the grace of Ram people are led from darkness to light, from death to life.

On another occasion when Tulsidas was passing along the Manikarnika ghat he happened to pass by a woman who had come there to commit Satee along with her dead husband ; she wore a red bordered Sari put bright vermillion on her forehead. Prostrating before Tulsi she wept piteously for the bereavement. Tulsidas was then in the mood of his Istha, Ram. Without being aware of the real situation Tulsidas blessed her that she might be blessed with a son. When his attention was drawn to the incongruity of the situation Tulsi meditated on Ram and by the grace of the Lord and by the women's own virtuous conduct the dead came to life, and it is said that some time later the blessing of Tulsi was also literally fulfilled.

Tulsidas had a tender heart and he was full of sympathy for the poor. On hearing of the yogic power of Tulsidas a poor Brahmin came to him with a request that he might intercede on his behalf to releive him of his poverty. Tulsidas prayed to the Mother Ganges and got him some land on the bank of the Ganges. On another occasion he gave a stone image of Ram to a poor Brahmin who as a result of worshipping the image became a prosperous man. The reputation of Tulsidas as a yogi had spread far and wide and it brought some unpleasant consequences. He was carried to Delhi and brought in the presence of the emperor who demanded that he should exhibit some of his yogic feats. As Tulsidas was in no mood to comply with his demand he speedily found himself in prison. Shortly thereafter a horde of monkeys began to attack the town and the emperor was informed that unless he released Tulsidas at once he and his town would be devastated. The emperor then thought that he had enough of yogic power, released Tulsidas and sent him home with honour.

Tulsidas knew that the end was approaching. He had accomplished his chosen mission that of spreading the glory of Ram. Ramchandra was no beckoning him. Although his body became poisoned with ulcers he continued to murmur the name of Ram for he had no other thought in his mind. Near his room at Asighat, chanting the holy name he attained Mahasamadhi in the year 1737. His spirit was conveyed to the abode of the Eternal and his fame has remained as a lasting monument on earth.

PAVHARI BABA

Harbhajan (afterwards known as Pavhari Baba) was born in 1840 as the second son of a well known pious Brahmin named Ajodhya Prasad in the tiny village of Premapur, district Jawnpur, Uttar Pradesh in a devout Vaisnava family of Bargalai section of Ramanuja sect. Lachmi Narayan, the elder brother of Ajodhya Prasad was then living in an Ashram at Kurta on the bank of the river Ganges near Gazipur and practising severe austerities for more than four decades and for this he was very much respected by the neighbours. When he became very old and almost blind due to illness Ajodhya Prasad hurried from Jawnpur to see him and out of love for his elder brother whom he respected very much as his guru suggested to him to send his eldest son Ganga Prasad to him as an attendant. But Lachmi Narayan did not agree to accept any help, after much persuasion when he agreed to accept an assistant he preferred Harbhanjan, the second son who, he knew, would have a very bright future. Accordingly Harbhajan was sent at the age of ten to Kurta Ashram to attend his uncle. This Harbhajan became afterwards known as Pavhari Baba, the well known saint of northern India.

Though Harbhajan was attending his old uncle he was looked upon more as a Brahmachari than as an attendant. With orchard cloth, shaven head, sacred thread hanging on his shoulders the tender boy looked very beautiful ; his free movement in the Ashram, refined behaviour, devotional temperament, sincere prayer, simplicity and charming look spoke of the future greatness latent in him. In order to train him as the future heir of the Ashram Lachmi Narayan taught him Vaisnava doctrine of Ramanuja and other scriptures of allied nature. Harbhajan began to lead a pure life. After bath in the Ganges in the early morning he would worship the Ashram deity and study scriptures. After this he would prepare Bhog of the deity, offer it with great devotion, and feed his uncle and other inmates. Along with spiritual practice he studied Sanskrit literature, Dharma Sastra, Jyotish under the famous Bechan Pandit of Gazipur and also under learned Acharyas. In this way he mastered many subjects.

At the age of sixteen he lost his uncle Lachmi Narayan his spiritual guide and teacher and was extremely mortified. In order to get rid of the restlessness of his mind he went on a pilgrimage after handing over the charge of the Ashram to another inmate. He first visited Dwaraka, worshipped Ranchorjee, the deity of the temple. After this he came to Girnar where he met an elderly spiritually advanced yogi living in a lonely cave mostly remaining merged in meditation. Harbhajan appealed to him fervently to teach him yoga. Though the yogi did not generally initiate any body yet out of kindness for the earnest aspirant he taught him some yogic secrets by practising which for several years Harbhajan turned into a new man. After visiting some more important places of pilgrimage when Harbhajan returned to Kurta Ashram at Gazipur people of neighbouring places welcomed him heartily. They found in him a dynamic personality shining with spiritual fervour capable of satisfying their spiritual needs. From now on the entire responsibility of the Ashram fell on him. It meant not merely the worship of the Ashram deity and supervision over all internal affairs including the service of the guests but also fullfilling the spiritual needs of hundreds of people who gathered round him for solace.

After contact with the yogi of Girnar and also with Narayan Swami, the famous yogi of Benares, a new chapter of his life began. The spirit of self surrender, devotion to God, severe austeries, and the humble nature of a heriditary devout Vaisnava combined with spiritual powers of a vetern yogi shone in him like the bright sun.

By this time the capacity to bear hardship grew very much in him. He gave up taking bread and lived on Sarvat prepared from past Bilva leaves with milk and sugar. For this he became known as Pavhari Baba, meaning one living on wind. He built a cave in the Ashram and remained in meditation for a day or two in the beginning and afterwards for a week or so. He would not come out for food, yet due to his yogic practices he maintained his vigour; he looked healthy and his face was shining with lustre.

Continued spiritual practice made Pavhari feel that he should remain merged in the meditation of God more than before and for this he should take the help of a guide. He started for meeting the yogi at Girnar cave but when he heard on the way that the said yogi had passed away he fell from the sky as it were. He took initiation from a very spiritually advanced soul belonging to Ramanuja sect then living at Ayodhya but his name was not known as Pavhari Baba never disclosed the name of his guru. After this he returned to Kurta Ashram at Gazipur. Through proper distribution of its activities among the inmates he managed its affairs consisting of the service of Sadhus and guests with the humble gifts of the householders who used to donate five seers of food staff for each plough. Sometimes he used to arrange big Bhandara (feast) when hundreds of Sadhus and poor people assembled there. This devout Vaisnava had a pecularity. Every object brought by devotees must bear the level of God Ram on it, the object without such level was never accepted. During the period of Magmela he went to Prayag and stayed in a Kutia to practise austerities. By this time due to continued practice of yoga the colour of his body became so beautiful and attractive that people got charmed.

Pavhari Baba was a yogi and a devout Vaisnava' Generally he was healthy and free from disease but once he was attacked with severe type of fever and there was no sign of its remission. Along with it came a bad symptom, his voice was choked but he, a believer in nature cure, was not prepared to take any medicine even at the earnest requests of devotees. After great persuasion by some learned Brahmins of Prayag in whom he had a great regard he agreed to take it and was given some medicine according to the prescription of an experienced Ayurvedic physician. Then he asked for some diet. Accordingly some sweets were brought but he kept both the medicine and diet separately saying that they would be utilized at night. This aroused some suspicion in the mind of some devotees and they kept an watch on him what he would do at night. At dead of night when others were enjoying deep sleep Pavhari Baba threw away both the medicine and diet to the river, took bath and then sat for meditation. Next morning those watchful devotees complained to him that it was improper on his part to waste money unnecessarily if he was determined not to touch medicine and diet which, they had seen, had been thrown into the Ganges. Pavhari Baba then said smilingly that both the medicine and diet had already been given to the disease, as a result he had been completely cured then. The devotees found to their astonishment that there was not the least symptom of any disease in Pavhari Baba.

On one occasion when Pavhari Baba was busy in a discourse with some devotees on some religious matter a mad wondering monk entered the compound, began to scold him right and left and was about to beat him, the devotees could not bear this mad fury and were about to turn him out with severe blows. Out of pity for the mad cap Pavhari intervened and remarked that by this extreme method the disease of the mad monk would not disappear. He requested them to bring him near. Then he cast his gracious look towards the mad monk patiently. After some time it was found to the astonishment of all present on the spot that the mad monk became completely cured within a short time.

On a different occasion an elderly Vaisnava Sadhu came to stay at the Ashram. He was proud, selfish and used to take opium and for this he demanded sufficient quantity of milk. Pavhari Baba did his best to please him, yet the mischievous Vaisnava Sadhu asked him to pay sufficient money for visiting the four Dhams (Puri, Rameswar, Dwaraka and Badrinath). It was not possible for Pavhari Baba to fulfil this desire of the Sadhu as it was beyond his means yet he said that he would try. Requesting the neighbouring devotees he could collect only one or two pieces of cloth. At this the cunning Sadhu though got wild did not say any thing openly. One day when he found Pavhari Baba alone he scolded right and left and demanded money. Pavhari Baba pleaded that he had no personal money, the only thing Ashram possessed was the gold ornament of the deity which, if the Sadhu demanded, might be given but the cunning Sadhu refused to accept it probably to evade future danger.

He demanded that the money spent uselessly for feeding so many devotees and Sadhus daily should be given to him, and said that he (Pavhari Babu) should leave the Ashram immediately without hesitation if he could not fulfil the said demand. Pavhari Babu left the Ashram that very night and next morning the neighbours found to their wonder that his cave in the Ashram was under lock and key and that the said cunning Vaisnava Sadhu, too, was missing and could not be traced even after thorough search for several years.

Leaving the Ashram that night Pavhari Babu started for Jagannath to pass the rest of his life in meditation of God but his desire was not fulfilled as he fell ill on the way. After recovery he lived sometime in a Kutia on the bank of Ganges at Brahmapur near Murshidabad. During this period he learnt Bengali and found great joy by studying Chaitanya Charitamrita. When the devotees came to know his whereabout they took him back to Gazipur after great persuasion. From now on he devoted most of his time in meditation, rarely would talk to his inner circle of devotees and would not come out of the Ashram generally except on some auspicious days when hundreds of devotees would come to see him. At this outsiders believed that Pavhari Baba either expired or left the Ashram. After the gap of several years when he came out of the cave and expressed his desire to feed the highly spiritnal Sadhus of different places the devotees immediately responded to his call and fulfilled his desire. This made him well known throughout northern India.

One night some thieves entered the Ashram to steal the utensils. Finding Babaji coming out of his cave at that time they tried to run away through fear of being caught by the Ashramites. Babaji requested them humbly to take whatever they liked. They knew Babaji well, so they took some utensils at his request but coming out they left the stolen goods and ran away. Babaji followed them with earnest request to take them otherwise they would do injustice to him.

On a different occasion as he sat for meditation a rat jumped on his shoulder through fear, he gave protection to it under his garment against a poisonous snake who ran after its victim ; consquently Pavhari Baba was bitten by it and fell unconscious. The devotees called for snake charmers and doctors to bring him to consciousness but in vain. They gave up all hope of his life. Fortunately after two days he regained consciousness and admitted that he paid the penalty through physical suffering for depriving the snake of its prey.

Thus his reputation spread all around. Hereafter distinguished persons used to come to see him. Among them were Swami Vivekananda, Keshav Chandra Sen, Pratap Chandra Majumdar, Sivanath Sastri are well known. Charmed by his love and personality Swami Vivekananda once thought of taking initiation from him but by the grace of his guru Sri Ramkrishna he abandoned the idea, yet, as sister Nivedita says, he used to regard Pavhari Baba as next to his guru in matters of spiritual acquisition. Once requested by Swami Vivekananda to bestow his spirituality and preach for the welfare of humanity Pavhari Baba said firmly that spirituality can be bestowed even without coming in contact with people in the physical plane. In the course of discussion one day he said humourously that he did not like to form a sect of noseless Sadhus. Once a notorious thief was caught red handed by people who cut his ear and set him free. Out of shame he fled to a forest and posed himself as a Sadhu. Gradually when his reputation spread all around as a good Sadhu many wanted to become his disciples but were refused except one young man who could not be disuaded. The earless Sadhu initiated the young man by cutting his nose and instructed him to increase the number of noseless Sadhus.

In the year-1898 one early morning in the month of Jaista (May-June) people were astonished to see Pavhari Baba sitting in Padmasana facing northward on a blanket before a Homa Kunda, clarified butter, inscence and his Yogadanda, Asha lying nearby, and a little after, his body burning with the Homa fire. With the dawn of highest spiritual acquisition the great yogi merged in this way in Mahasamadhi by offering his body in the Homa fire.

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GAMBHIRNATH

When the call comes from above none can resist it. The reason for it is that it finds an echo at the very core of one's responsibility. In that state of mind worldly life becomes distasteful and one no longer feels the charm of household life or of wealth or of the love of one's relations. The indifference to the call of the world or of the flesh is the precursor to the great call, the call of the spirit. It is true that it takes time before it becomes clearly audible, but at the right time it is heard as though it were a clarion call. That call drags the spiritual aspirant away from hearth and home. Such was the case with Gambhirnath, the young hero of our story.

Gambhirnath was born of an aristrocratic family of Kashmir. As a boy he was remarkable for his spiritual beauty. Although the village where he was born did not provide much opportunity for an intellectual education, he availed himself of the cultural heritage of the home. He was endowed with an innate sympathy for the poor and the afflicted; and the attitude of mind coupled with his strong physique and charming complexion naturally endeared him to the people of the village. It earned him the love and respect of his companions and playmates. But he used to sit by himself, absorbed in his own thought in the burning ghat near by, hours used to pass thus. He also availed himself of whatever opportunity presented itself to serve the Sadhus who came to his native place. In this way he was drawn to religious conversation and to talks on the nature of God. It is true that he was at times scolded by the members of his family for neglecting his secular responsibilities. But the contact with the Sadhus awakened his innate spiritual propensities and with the ripening of the Sanskaras the desire for liberation became even more keenly felt. What he sought in life was the peace that passeth understanding.

That quest for peace ineffable can not be achieved without a spiritual guide. In the fulness of time he met an elderly Sadhu who at the request of Gambhirnath for initiation, advised him to approach Gopalnath, the monk-in-charge of the Goraknath monastery at Gorakpur in U. P. He was a yogi with special spiritual attainments and many aspiring souls sought shelter under him. After abandoning all home comforts the love of his relations and the pleasant surroundings of his village the young boy at last reached the monastery and received the blessings of Gopalnath who foresaw at once the great spiritual future awaiting him. Out of abounding grace he accepted him as his disciple at first sight. He underwent the formalities of being initiated in the

Nath sect such as the cutting of the tuft of hair and the wearing of the special dress of the Nath sect. He was renamed Gambhirnath.

Not many details regarding his early life are available to us the reason for it is that when once a person becomes a Sadhu he holds that the world around him is of no more significance than a dream world. Moreover new responsibilities lay ahead of him, such as the worship of the Deity installed in the Ashram, the rendering of the personal service to guru, the entertainment of guests, not to mention the minor problems connected with looking after the cows and buffaloes of the Ashram, which was, in sense, a part of the traditional service rendered by a Brahmachari. He had also to keep the account of the Ashram funds. In the midst of these diverse activities he had to find time for combining together work and worship, service and meditation went hand in hand. He practised severe austerities ; whatever be the nature of work he under took he always took care to practise the presence of God. He used to feel at times that the crowded atmosphere of the Ashram imposed a heavy burden on him. He wished to go out into the solitude of the world in quest of his wondrous own, the Self or Atman within.

Gambhirnath set out at the bidding of his guru to the holy city of Benares, the land of Lord Viswanath and of Mother Annapurna, the giver of Jnana and Vairagya. On the way to the holy city he felt hungry and sat by the road side out of sheer exhaustion. In the mean time an old unknown Brahmin who had been instructed in a dream, brought him food and fed him sumptuously. Gambhirnath spent three years at Benares spending his time in spiritual practice, meditation and prayer. His reputation as a great yogi spread far and wide. In order to avoid the crowd which gathered in the wake of such far and long reputation he reached Prayag by the way of Jhusi and he spent three more years in spiritual pursuits and in meditation. A young Sadhu named Mukutnath who happened to come there by chance served him cordially and to his best ability. Gambhirnath continued his spiritual quest and spent some time on the banks of the Narmada. On the way this beautiful young Sanyasin with matted hairs halted by the wayside at the abode of a Sadhu who was absorbed in meditation. Gambhirnath also sat down for meditation. But as soon as he sat down he saw with his open eyes a snake to pass around him thrice and then it disappeared into the forest. This experience repeated on three consecutive days. After some days when one of the inmates of the cottage returned and heard what had happened he congratulated Gambhirnath and said that obviously the snake was a great soul who presented himself before him under that disguise.

At the end of his pilgrimage Gambhirnath returned to Goraknath monastery to the great satisfaction of Gopalnath and other inmates of the Ashram. But within a short time he decided to live in a lonely place so that he might avoid the crowd which was likely to gather and he preferred Kapildhara, a very beautiful place suitable for the practice of spirituality. It is situated at the foot of the Brahmayoni hill near the holy temple of Lord Vishnu, Gaya, where Buddha and Sri Chaitanya had their lives transformed. The only earthly possessions that Gambhirnath had at that time were a blanket, a pot made on cocoanut shell which served as an alms bowl, and his Yogadanda. It was as though to help him in his practice of severe austerity that God sent him, out of infinite mercy, a poor wood cutter named Akkur Kurmi who was living in the outskirts of Gaya and who used to supply some fire wood for his Dhuni and also provided him with some fruits for his livelihood. Gradually Akkur's brother and other inmates of the family became devoted to Gambhirnath who, too, had a soft corner for this poor family of wood cutters.

It was at this time that Nripatnath and Siddhanath, the two young spiritual aspirants arrived at Kapildhara in quest of a suitable spiritual guide. They took their abode in a nearby temple. Although in the beginning Gambhirnath refused to take them as disiciples, Nripatnath continued to serve him as his guru and took every possible step to help him in austere meditation. He used to stand at the entrance, trident in hand, warding off wild animals and keeping out the crowd. Gradually the reputation of Gambhirnath as a great yogi spread far and wide and people from far and near came to visit him.

It was at this time that a person named Madholal Panda who was a rich and powerful citizen of Gaya became entangled in a very complicated law suit ; if he should lose his case he would be left a beggar in the street. On seeing that there was no way out of the imminent danger he sought shelter under the benignant care of Gambhirnath and beseeched his gracious favour. Fortunately for him, on account of the great yogi, he won his case in a miraculous way. From that time forward Madholal became one of his greatest devotees and out of gratitude built for him a cave with an altar within it. In this cave Gambhirnath lived for more than twelve years. He used to sing melodious song and spend his midnights absorhed in meditation. He became Mouni and spent long periods of silence, practising severe austerities.

He attained also the reward of it all in the form of the realization of Brahman. The realized soul has no enemies, that was the reason why the wild animals became friendly with him, and did no harm to him. He was recognised as a highly advanced yogi by the Nath yogis living in the adjacent Barabar hill, by Takurdasbaba of Dhania hill, who happened to be a follower of the Nanak sect, by Ramdas Katiababa who was a well known Vaisnava saint of Brindaban and by Vijay Krishna Goswami, the eminent Brahma preacher. In fact the religious leaders of diverse sects agreed in honouring him.

To one who has attained Brahmajnana, the Gita ideal of Samadarsan comes to be the natural attitude of mind. To him even the wood :cutter devotee Akkur, was as worthy of consideration as more exalted ones. He was attacked with terrible illness. When all other resources failed the relations of Akkur thought of bringing out his worn out body and placing before Gambhirnath. Muni, the younger brother of Akkur ran to give the advance information about it. When the dying patient was brought before him Gambhirnath touched his body and sprinkled some holy water from his pot. Although at the point of death Akkur, after a short while, regained conciousness. After this incident he continued to live for a long time.

At times a tiger used to come out of his lonely lair, move round the yogi and silently stalk away. One day he appeared before the yogi when a number of other people were present ; and all of them became very much frightened. But the yogi assured them that all would be well and asked them to be calm. The tiger looked at the yogi and then at the others and then retired quietly as though it were a tame animal. The fact is, the love of a yogi can tame even the most ferocious of animals. Even when he was at the Gorakpur Ashram Gambhirnath had been a friend of the animals. By his touch he not only tamed the ferocity of animals, but also the ferocity of men who were not less cruel than wild animals. There was at Gaya a mad cap named Sunilal Dhariwal who took a special delight in torturing the Sadhus of Kapildhara by hurling sticks stones and other things at them. One day when his madness went to the extreme Gambhirnath caught hold of him and slapped him violently. After that incident no one noticed any remarkable instance of madness in him. In fact he began to behave as though he were a normal man, entered business and earned a large fortune.

It is not only individuals but also groups of people that become subject to occasional fits of violence. It so happened that on the occasion of Kumbha mela at Allahabad the Vaisnavas Nagas became enraged and in a fit of mob violence began to attack the Nath yogis and the Sanyasins who were residing in their camps. Gambhirnath stood before them and in a calm voice asked them to maintain peace. That voice was in itself sufficient to control the crowd and avert the bloodshed which might have taken place in the camp. The infuriated mob bowed before him and retired. There are other episodes which are not less significant. On a particular occasion one of his devotees who had served him for many years requested him to show his yogic power. This particular Brahmin was much devoted to him. Gambhirnath wished to cure him of his egoism. Citing an instance from the life of Goraknath he said, that on a previous occasion when Goraknath was requested by one of his devotees to demonstrate his yogic power he vomited the milk and food which were served for him and kept separately although they had been served to him long ago, and that the very sight of it, frightened the Brahmin who pressed for the display of yogic power at the beginning, then besought his pardon. When, in the course of time, the Kapildhara cave became crowded Madholal purchased for him, at enormous cost a garden house and it was at this place that Gambhirnath lived when he returned from his pilgrimage. In fact there were very few places of pilgrimages which Gambhirnath had not visited.

When Gambhirnath was travelling with a few monks in the state of Udaipur he stayed on one occasion in an open place and he spent the night before the Dhuni. As it happened to be the rainy season a heavy shower of rain came down and the whole place was soaked with rain ; but strange to say not a drop of rain fell at the place where Gambhirnath and his followers had gathered. At this exihition of yogic power the fame of Gambhirnath spread far and wide. Even the Maharaja of Udaipur heard of it and he requested the yogi to visit the palace. Although Gambhirnath declined the invitation, the Maharaja would not stand the denial. He himself offered to come and meet the yogi ; and when Gambhirnath came to know of it he quietly left the place and went away. The fact is, the seeker after God shuns publicity as far as the world is concerned. The discerning however recognised him. One such person was the well known monk Gokulnath who described him as a great Rajayogi. Saradakanta Banerji, and Monoranjan Guha Takurta, and the disciples of Vijaykrishna Goswami paid him high tribute as a great yogi.

Strange are the ways of the yogis. They shun what the world adore yet they are full of compassion and it specially goes out for the lowly and the lost. Gambhirnath had a soft corner for the poverty striken and even for those who were criminally disposed. On one occasion when he was at Gaya some of these anti-social elements came to his Ashṛam at midnight. Gambhirnath invited them to come within and take away whatever they wanted ; and though they availed themselves of the invitation they did not forget to offer their reverential salutation before leaving the Ashram. In the course of time the compasion of the yogi had a miraculously transforming effect, for when they turned up a second time, although there was nothing to take, the yogi offered them his only blanket. They refused to take it. After some time they gave up their habit of stealing altogether.

After the passing away of Gopalnath, Dibarnath became the head of the Gorakath monastery and he was followed by Sundernath. During the ṭime of Sundernath the management of the Ashram deteriorated very much. At the repeated request of the members although he declined the offer on previous occasions Gambhirnath accepted the responsibility on condition that Sundernath continued to be the monk-in-charge. It was not because of the honour associated with the office but because he wished to save the institution from imminent crisis. His efficiency in managing the affairs of the Ashram was remarkable. He remained unattached, happy and calm even in the midst of intense activity. It was this serene attitude of mind which charmed every one. Akshoy Kumar Banerjee writes that his life was very simple. He kept just one or two pieces of cloth and was content with the barest necessities of life ; he partook of the food which was prepared for all the inmates ; no special dishes were prepared for him. Monks, householders and guests were alike received with great cordiality. Gambhirnath displayed his yogic power on different occasions when emergency demanded. On one occasion a large number of monks and Brahmins arrived at the monastery. Their number was thrice more than that of the number of persons for whom food had been prepared. When he was informed of this difficulty Gambhirnath asked his attendant to spread his new cloth over the foodstaffs and he assured them that all would be well and indeed his words came to be true by the grace of God. Again on another occasion during a particular summer season a large number of monks assembled at the Ashram ; it was the season when the mango ripens but there were not enough mangoes for the purpose. Gambhirnath saved the situation by spreading a new piece of cloth over the basket which contained the mangoes. The benevolence of Gambhirnath was not confined to the Ashram only. It was extended to all those who approached him. Once a respectable woman wept piteously and told him her sad story. Her only son had proceeded to England in order to attain the requisite qualification of a Barrister by studying at one of the inns of the court London. But the members of the family had not any information from him for a long time. When Gambhirnath looked at the eyes of the mother he felt great compassion for her. He retired to his room and spent an hour in meditation. He then opened the door, assured the mother who was awaiting that all was well with her son that in fact her son was on his way home and that he would be at Gorakpur next monday. And so it came to pass. When the son appeared before Gambhirnath, he, too, was struck with wonder. He had seen Gambhirnath in the ship at the time when he was in meditation within the closed door ; and he wonderd how Gambhirnath could come to Gorakpur.

A number of episodes are told of Gambhirnath's kindness for the members of his staff and how he looked after their welfare. If any body commited a mistake Gambhirnath would point out the error and transfer him to a different department. The delinquent might be occasionally scolded but was never dismissed. That was because he did not wish that enforced poverty should lead him to commit crimes. The poor as well as those who were the tenants of the Ashram estate alike felt his healing touch ; and he would never say 'no' to any of their requests. His love extended to even the animals and birds not excluding the dogs and rats. He never wore silk cloth because he did not wish that the worms should be boiled in the cocoon for the sake of silk they have woven.

From the year 1909 Gambhirnath appeared in a new role. The number of disciples increased ; a large number of them came from Bengal. Some of them received initiation in dream. Among them there was an influential doctor from Comilla, a boy who lived at a very distant village and another from Mymensingh. When they arrived at Gorakpur and verified it in the presence of Gambhirnath what they had been taught in their dreams, their wonder knew no bounds when they saw in flesh and blood the very person whom they had seen in their dreams.

There was at Gorakpur a well known doctor named Kantichandra sen, Although he administered medicine to all patients he never treated any of the members of his family. If any of them should fall ill he would take the ashes from the Dhuni of Gambhirnath and smear it on the sick person. On one occasion when his son was at the point of death he took the ashes of the Ashabari incense of the yogi and by administering it saved him from death. Although Gabhirnath was endowed with great yogic powers he never made use of them in his own personal affairs. Once when the Ashram was involved in a law suit with the authorities of a neighbouring temple he relied entirely upon the advice of his lawyers. When Gambhirnath fell ill he submitted himself to the medical treatment of his doctors, restricted himself to prescribed diet and conducted in every way like any other ordinary patient ; and at times he used to become as impatient as a child. Once his disease took a serious turn. Being unable to bear this his disciple Kalinath Brahmachari who was then attending upon him requested him to exercise his yogic power in order to be cured of the disease. At this suggestion Gambhirnath asked 'shall I upset the decree of the Lord' ? He submitted himself to arduous course of medical treatment and he was saved from death. Later on Gambhirnath was brought to Calcutta for eye operation. During his stay at Calcutta many people of Bengal availed themselves of the opportunity to receive initiation and their number is said to have exceeded six hundred.

Afterwards he left for Hardwar for the ensuing Kumbhamela and he spent some time at Nath Dalicha—a camp near the Brahmakunda meant for the monks of the Nath order. After his return from Hardwar he lived in mortal body only for two years. During this time his mind seemed to be absorbed in the thought of God. He became indifferent to all external affairs. He felt the call from the High. During his old age, although he was in weak health he passed three days in the Siva temple at Yogi Chawk near Gorakpur. Within a few days thereafter he announced to the inmates of the Ashram that he would be leaving for a different state. He consulted the Almanac and fixed the date for his departure. By the term 'state' his discipies took it to be some

Zamindari estate belonging to the Ashram, they did not understand that it meant the state of bliss. They entreated him that, considering the present state of his health he should desist from such a step. He assured them and said 'There is nothing to worry, the place is lovely and healthy ; there is no fear of any danger and his health is bound to improve as the place lies beyond good and evil and is ever blissful'.

On 21st March, 1917 (8th, Chaitra, the holy Baruni Trayodasi) the day fixed according to the Almanac, when he entered Mahasamadhi, the inmates of the Ashram and his disciples came to realise the meaning of the expression 'state' for he was indeed' lying in a state' of bliss.

VIDYARANYA SWAMI

Hampi is a small village on the bank of the river Tungabhadra in the district of Belari, Andra Pradesh. It inaugurated the birth of a very great soul who left a mark not only on the religious history but also on the social and political history of India. About 1278 Vidyaranya Swami allias Madhav was born to Mayan, a pious and poor but very learned Yujur Vedic Brahmin of Varadwaj line. His mother Srimati was a very pious lady like her husband. He had two more brothers, and a sister. Sayanacharya, the famous commentator of the Vedas was one of them. Madhav began his study in the Sanskrit Chatuspathy of his father. Like his brother Sayanacharya he was so meritories that whatever he heard once he could reproduce. After completion of their study at home they were sent to Kanchi (present Conjeeveram) the famous place of learning in the south for the best training of aspiring souls of different places from the best professors, philosophers and religious teachers. Madhav found there a very sincere friend named Venkatnath who specialized in dualistic philosophy whereas he himself a made thorough research in monistic philosophy. Born with the uncommon spirit of independence this God-gifted genius, by dint of perseverance, personality and keen intellect, became master of various Sastras but Advaita Vedanta was his most favourite subject.

Returning home after completion of his studies as a Snataka, he began his ancestral profession which was the study of the scriptures, writing commentaries on them and teaching the same to aspiring brilliant students but this profession could not bring any material prosperity for him. He was denied the blessings of the Goddess of wealth who perhaps keeps herself at a considerable distance from the Goddess of learning. Yet through his writing his reputation spread throughout India. Though he was married and stricken by extreme poverty he never for a moment forgot his research work, nor the miserable condition of the country. Chaos prevailed every where. Persecution burning of houses, loot, arson, indiscriminate murder, forcible conversion, molestation of women, and demolition of temples and monasteries by foreign hordes made the condition worse. What pained him most was the indifferent attitude of the people and the state towards religion and culture which passed through a critical stage. He wanted to establish the glory of religion and culture, hoist the banner of Advaita Vedanta as profounded by Sankaracharya in his life but extreme poverty stood on the way, it was about to crush him physically, mentally and spiritually. The misery of the people made him restless. Keen intellect and liberalism alone are not sufficient to carry out the dream of establishing the kingdom of Truth. One must possess vast wealth, men power and powerful organisation but without the grace of the supernatural power nothing can be achieved. So he went to the temple of the Goddess Bhubaneswari at Hampi, began severe austerities, prayer and meditation and was determined to fast into death till assured by the Mother for the fulfilment of his dream. For seven days he prayed untiringly. At last he heard the voice of the Goddess who said that his desires would not be fulfilled. Totally disappointed at this he realised that the life of a householder with extreme poverty which could not be of any help to the country was not worth living but suicide is the greatest sin condemned very much by scriptures. So he left home for good, reached the Sringeri Math, the foremost centre of Indian culture and Advaita Vedanta in the south.

A new chapter of his life began here. He took Sanyas, the life of renunication from the elderly Sanyasin Vidya Sankar Tirtha, the head of the monastery. What he could not achieve as a householder he fulfilled as a Sanyasin. His carrier as a Sanyasin brought a revolution in the political life of South India. It was he who as the guide of Harihar Roy founded the kingdom of Vijaynagar, brought order and peace in the chaotic condition of the country and gave protection and relief to the persecuted people. This Harihar Roy was formerly a minister of Warangal but after the fall of that kingdom he took shelter in the kingdom of Kampili; he lost that shelter also when Kampili was annexed by foreign hordes. He was arrested with his whole family, taken before the emperor of Delhi, who finding him an efficient administrator wanted to utilize him for annexing more neighbouring kingdoms. Harihar Roy endeavoured to regain the lost territory with the king of Haysal but failed. Frustrated thus he came away with his brother Bukka Roy to the temple of the Goddess Bhubaneswari on the hill.

As said before though Vidyaranya Swami was leading the austere life of a Sanyasin at Sringeri, attending religious convocation, solving abstruse philosophy of monism, his mind was not free ; he could not wipe out from his mind the thought of his country which was suffering from the persecution of foreign hordes, which unless made free would continue to suffer for an indefinite period. The subjection of the country, the demolition of temples at Sri Rangam, Madura and other places made him restless. He took leave of his guru to see their condition personally and on his way to the native land he came to the temple of Bhubaneswari. First time when he came here as a house-holder he failed to achieve the grace of Mother but this time he came as a Sanyasin. Time and circumstances were favourable and he got Mother's blessing ; he met there accidently the above mentioned Harihar Roy. By the grace of the Mother they discovered at the foot of the hill, a lonely place where Harihar Roy saw with his own eyes some hares which forgot their traditionally very timid nature and became extremely ferocious and drove away his horse and hunting dogs. Vidyaranya Swami realised the signficance of this unusual incident. Mother willing such things may happen, he selected that very lonely place as the proper site for building a fort and the city. At his instruction when that hare-protected area was excavated the hidden treasure of gold was discovered and and this treasure helped him to carry out his dream. This unexpected happening made him fully confident that the spiritual power of Brahmins combined with the true heroism of

Kshatriyas can do wonders. The truth of this can be verified from the Ramayan where Viswamitra supplied Ramchandra the mystic power of killing the demons (Tadaka and others) and also from the Mahabharat when Dronacharya taught the art of archery and use of mystic weapons to Arjuna. No where there is evidence that Kshatriyas supply mystic power to Kshatriyas nor the Brahmins attain success without the help of the Kshatriyas. From the bone of the selfless sage Dadichi the weapon for killing Britrasura was prepared.

When the construction of the fort and the city was complete Vidyaranya Swami asked Harihar Roy to take, before the inauguration of the coronation ceremony, initiation and blessings of Vidya Tirtha, the head of the monastry at Sringeri as it would help him to regain the confidence lost for working under a foreigner. After the inauguration ceremony, the city was known as Vidyanagar in the name of the guru. This city afterwards came to be known as famous centre of Vijaynagar kingdom.

Under the direction of Vidyaranya Swami Harihar Roy and Bukka Roy raised big army, defeated their opponents, established a powerful kingdom and brought the Carnatic area under their rule and created a federation of small states to preserve the culture and religion against the onslaught of foreign hordes. In this way the dream land of Vidyaranya Swami came into existence which afterwards became the well-known historical great kingdom of Vijaynagar. It maintained its solidarity for about three hundred years against the powerful Muslims and Portugues pirates who tortured people and made forcible conversion. Under the guidance of its spiritual founder Harihar Roy declared that it was Virupaksa (Siva) who was the real ruler of the kingdom and he (Harihar Roy) acted as the Lord's servant. Its territory extented up to Warangal, Deogiri, Haysal and other places.

During the time of Bukka Roy its glory rose very high. When the news of persecution, demolition of temples by the Sultan of Madura reached Vidyaranya Swami at Sringeri he was extremely pained. He came to Viyaynagar to find some remedy for this. At his inspiration Bukka Roy permitted the heoric prince Kampan, the then governor of the Tamil land to recover the lost glory of Madura and Sri Rangam and save the people from the persecution of the iconoclasts. The prince succeeded in this. The history of this victory is beautifully described by the learned poetess Gangadevi, the wife of Kampan, the conqueror. Robert scot writes in his Forgotten Empire, Victors of India in the 14th and 15th century P. 584-85, that the area of Viyaynagar was bigger than the Austrian empire. It was not only strong militarily and economically but also great in literature, architecture and sculpture. The rise, growth of this vast kingdom was possible because of the keen intellect and guidance of Vidyaranya Swami. The glory of this kingdom is verified from the inscription, architecture, literature and coin found there. Barbosa, the traveller, giving a description of this land holds, that the Christians, Jews, Muslims and the Hindus got equal treatment which shows that the kings of Viyaynagar were free from sectarianism. History and culture of Indian people, by Majumdar and Pusalkar Vol VI, P. 322 and the history of south India by K. A. N. Sastri P. 326 supply details about Viyaynagar.

As said before the all round improvement of Viyaynagar was due to the wonderful ability of its spiritnal founder Vidyaranya Swami who acted as the Prime Minister for ten years and guided for twenty years the most important administrative policy of the Kigdom from Sringeri. With the solidarity of the Kingdom Vidyarnya Swami, the personified liberalism devoted his energy to turn it to an ideal kingdom and centre of culture and learning. Free as he was from narrowness, he, in order to build the kingdom of spirituality and culture sought co-operation of all religious sects and extended invitation to savants of all philosophical doctrines. With help of his brother Sayanacharya, the prince of scholars of the age and with the active co-operation of the men of errudition such as Narayana Vajpeyi, Somayaji, Ponneri Dikshit and other scholars he created the most favourable atmosphere where philosophy, religion and culture could get every scope for building an ideal cultural kingdom.

After establishing the ideal kingdom he lived mostly at Sringeri and devoted his time to the propagation of culture and Advatia Vedanta. From the chronological list of the heads of the monastery it is known that after Vidyasankar Tirtha and Bharati Tirtha, Vidyaranya Swami became the twenty sixth monk-in-charge of that monastery. His unparalleled versatile genius expressed itself in various ways. His reputation as the founder and guide of a kingdom, political leader, diplomat, philosopher, poet, historian, gramarian, author, encyclopaedist and as the leader of a Sanyasin sect spread every where. He got Vedartha Prakash, the commentary of the four Vedas written by his brother Sayanacharya. The list of works written by him proves his versatile genius. Such a personalty with foresight and keen intellect is rarely born. The Dwipika of Aitareya, Taittiriya and Chhandogya, Brihadaranyak Vartiksara, Parasar Madhav (the commentary of Parasara Smriti), Jaiminiya Nyayamala Bistar (commentary of Purva Mimansa), Vibaran Prameya Sangraha, Anubhuti Prakash (a Prakaran Granta of Vedanta in verses), Commentary of Aparoksanubhuti (by Sankar), Jivanmukti Viveka consisting of the duties of Sanyasins, Panchadasi, the the well known Prakaran Granta of Vedanta, Kalamadhav (collection of Smriti), Dhatuvritti and other writings are the important works of this great soul. Panchadasi will shine as long as Vedanta will remain. Therein his philosophical doctrine is fully expressed in Tattwa Viveka chapter. According to him knowledge is self effulgent, it is neither appearing nor disappearing, it is eternal, it is Consciousness, Atman and is free from all differences.

He appeared at a period when the influence of Advaita Vedanta was on the wane due to the preaching of Visistadwaita doctrine by Ramanuja, Jamunacharya, Venkatanath etc, Dwaita doctrine by Madhavacharya, Aksovya and others and also due to the preaching of Bhedhavedhabad of Vaskaracharya and others after defeating the opponents he kept the banner of Advaita Vedanta ever high. Through Panchadasi he refuted Purva mimansa, dualism, qualified monism and other doctrines. Activity, devotion and knowledge combined in him to the fullest extent.

At old age when he was staying at Sringeri after retirement from the active service of the people and the country he kept aloof from the world and remained merged in the thought of Vedanta. At this time when the king of Vijanynagar sought instruction from him regarding the guidance of the state he smilingly quoted the famous verse of Yoga Vasistha where it is said that crores of Brahma with their creations have gone, crores of kings have disappeared. when death is inevitable what is the use of attachment for life ? Gradually his health shattered. During the last moment of his life when admirers and disciples asked him whether he had any message to give to the people of Vijaynagar he uttered smilingly 'There is nothing in the world in which I do not exist and which does exist in me. When I pervade the whole universe what should I desire ? Whatever exists all around is but the pure Consciousness of my Atman pervading every where'. Saying this the Advaita Vedantin merged in Mahasamadhi.

TIRUPPAN ALWAR

What the Ganges is to the north that the Cauvery is to the south. It takes its origin in the Brahmagiri hill in Coorg and flows towards Mysore and after flowing through the fertile plains of the Tamil country ends finally in the sea. It is atonce the giver of spiritual consolation and of material well-being. In the course of its progress to the sea for five hundred miles the river forms the three islands—Sri Rangapattam in Mysore, Siva Sundaram in the middle and Sri Rangam in its lower reach. Vishnu temples are dedicated to God at these places.

The temple has a message to give. It proclaims that the supremacy of the spirit over all mundane things is undeniable, it declares that God comes first and the world after ; it places worship above work ; it refuses to bow down to the call of the flesh and of mortal gains, its language is uncomprising ; it holds that all efforts without spiritual foundation is useless ; it gives solace to the weary hearts and disillusioned intellectuals and brings message of hope that it is possible to reach God even in one's life time, that it is possible to see Him and be with Him.

According to the tradition of the Vaisnavas the image of Ranganath was the family deity of the Ikshaku line of kings who ruled over Ajodhya. Pleased with the devotion of Vibhishan Sri Ramchandra gave it to his favourite devotee to be installed in his country according to his intention. On the way to Ceylon to make the island of Sri Rangam in the river Cauvery His permanent abode the image was installed at the said place. So out of devotion towards Ranganath Vibhishan used to visit the holy place once in twelve years. The temple of Ranganath in the south arose out of humble beginnings though later on Ramanuja elevated it to an earthly Vaikunta which is fit to be contemplated by the devout thrice a day. At one time the temple was in a delapidated condition and was the haunt of bats and wild animals. Even the officiating priest ventured to go there once and would be glad to make escape after offering some flowers and water to the deity. There was at that time an ardent devotee of the name of Tirumangai Alwar who, though he was peniless, took upon himself the great task of rebuilding the temple of the Lord. He found that the indifference of the people was a great obstacle in his path. No one contributed any thing though if they were willing they could contribute much. Tirumangai thought that he could get by force what he failed by persuasion. It was in this way that he found himself at the head of a gang of robbers looting the looters of the public for he thought that there was nothing wrong in taking for the service of the Lord what the Lord had given to the others. He engaged the best of sculptors and architects in the construction of the temple. It took sixty years to complete it. There is a belief that once going to plunder the palace of a king he entered a temple and removed the ornaments of the deity all studded with costly jewels and diamonds. Failing with all his endeavours to remove the diamond ring which sat so close around the flower-like finger of deity he touched with his teeth the finger of the deity to take it out. All on a sudden the divine wisdom flashed within him. Mad with the love of God he sang His glory in thousand verses which are even today sung as Tirumali (sacred utterances). In his zeal to build the temple at Sri Rangam it is said that he wished to despoil the temple at Tirumalai but the divine grace saved him from commiting this crime and he sang a number of songs in praise of the Lord.

The seven walled magnificient temple at Sri Rangam is situated on the holy island formed by the Cauvery in the south and Colaron in the north. Meanwhile it rose step by step and came to be a great centre of pilgrimage and of elaborate rituals and gorgeous processions where thousands of pilgrims thronged. The deity is believed to be the refuge of the beings, the bestower of mystic power, the helmsman accross the ocean of life and their protector from danger. On festival days hundreds and thousands of devotees from various parts assemble to pay their homage to the deity. When the Utsab Vigraha of Sri Ranganath seated on the shoulder of his vehicle of Garuda is taken out in procession the Brahmins chant the Vedas with great devotion. Georgeously decorated elephants marked with upward marks on their foreheads follow them with majestic pace waving their trunks. Bullocks with long horns and fat humps each carrying two drums slung on their backs remain behind them. Beautifully decorated horses carrying double drums beaten by drummers follow them.

At their heels huge crowd of moving devotees sing to the accompaniment of musical instruments. Devotees worship the deity with cocoanuts, flowers, inscense, fruits and other accessories.

Among those who wished to visit the temple and derive spiritual consolation there was one Tiruppan by name. He belonged to the caste of untouchables who do all kinds of unpleasant work in order to keep society clean but who are themselves regarded as unclean. All that can be known of his childhood was that he was found in a paddy field by a person belonging to low caste, singing was the profession of his caste, so he was proficient in playing on Yal (a kind of stringed instrument). Being a Panchama he was denied priviledges of studying the scripturess and other subjects which men of other high castes enjoy. This caste prejudice is an abhoring sore in the society. For this loophole the society is being denied the benefits of many geniuses and spiritual giants. Though a Panchama he was concious to the aim of life which is God realization. He lived a very simple life and did not move like commoners, so people took him to be a lunatic but harmless and humble. But such was his innate Samskara that inspite of adverse circumstances he spent his time in chanting the glory of Lord Raghanath with his Vina. While singing with single minded devotion he would some times forget the world outside and remain merged in the meditation of God. Although the purifying effect of the temple was denied to him the sacred river Cauvery which skirts the temple was accessable to all and here on the bank of the sacred stream he used to spend his time in singing the praise of the Lord. All that he prayed for was that the Lord should be gracious to him after death after he has shuffied off his physical body which alone was considered to be the cause of pollution.

It may be stated in passing that as the temple gate was abutting on the bank of the river the priest who officiated at the temple used to take water from this particular ghat for divine service. This ghat was the favourite haunt of Tiruppan because the crest of the temple tower was visible from that place. He would gaze at temple tower and feel as happy as if he had visited the Lord in person. At times he became so deeply absorbed that he was oblivious of his where abouts and what took place around him.

Sitting alone one day on the bathing ghat in the Cauvery he looked at the golden jar on the crest of the temple. The desire to see the deity in the temple arose but is was hope against hope, he prayed with single minded devotion "Glory upto Lord Ranganath. I bow down to your lotus feet. Due to previous Karma I am born in a low family, I have no right to enter the pricint of your magnificent temple and see your most beautiful form, for me the temple gate is closed, yet I am not disappointed, after death the question of birth and impurity will not remain. Oh gracious God, please give me shelter after death. I know that you exist in my heart day and night yet I feel sometimes to be near you in the temple and see how devotees worship there with garlands, flowers, fruits, sweets and other acessories". Tears rolled on from his eyes profusely, he became absorbed in the meditation of God, the outer world disappeared and he was lying as if lost in sleep.

One day Lokasaranga Muni who was an attendant in the temple came to the ghat to have his ablutions there. He found Tiruppan stretched on one of the steps as if lost in sleep. His way to the ghat was barred and it was getting late for the worship of the deity in the temple. He called upon the untouchable to move out of the way, but there was no response. He felt vexed that the purity of the river should be defiled by an untouchable. In order to teach him a lesson he violently belaboured Tirupan in his anger so that he might not commit a similar offence in the future. The demon of hatred fanned by superior caste consciousness dragged him to take extreme course, not satisfied with this he pelted stones towards the poor soul for polluting the holy water of the river Cauvery. Blood began to flow profusely from the wounded places, he ran away through fear.

After having in this way given his exposition to his resentment which he mistook for righteous indignation the priest finished his bath in the river and returned to the temple with water for the Abhiseka of the deity. Obviously any one else in the position of Tiruppan would have felt hurt at the injustice of the society, but Tiruppan was an ardent devotee, rather he felt grieved that he should be the cause of delay in the performance of divine service. He begged pardon of the attendant of Lord Ranganath and ran away from that place.

He appealed to the presiding deity of the river 'Oh mother, I do not know from where you flow and where you end. I do not know your source and destination. I have always believed that you are ever pure, the very thought of yours removes sin. You carry heaps of dirty thing, wretched people wash their dirt in your water, innumerable sinners bathe in your river. Even jackals, dogs and wild animals drink your water and some time finish their nature's call in your holy water and pollute it yet you remian pure. Is my shadow so impure that it deprives you of your purity? He also appealed to the Lord who stands enshrined by the river. To him it looked as though the Lord was kept a prisoner and deprived of receiving the heart-felt worship of those who were excluded. Addressing Ranganath he said "Oh Lord, I have ever believed and still believe that you are Vaisvanara, you have by your power purified the entire universe. All beings both animate and inanimate are pervaded by you. I know that you are dear to all and not of the twice born alone who claim exclusive right on your service. I do not know how you bear this unpardonable injustice. Let blood flow profusely from my body. I do not feel sorry for this. The physical torture will not harm me. But I feel extremely sorry when I think of the miserable condition in which you are placed. This casteism has deprived your innumerable sons to derive the benefit of your worship and vision. Does it not effect the tender lute of your heart ? Do you not feel for them ? The pitiest thing is that you are living within the temple as a prisoner having no freedom to receive your dear ones. I do not care for liberation. But when will you be free from this berrier ? The noise of bell, gong, drum has made you deaf as it were. Has royal dish in the golden cage made you forget your duties ? I pray you break this berrier.

The humble prayer of this outcaste was not without effect. The stone image seemed to demonstrate its sympathy towards the devotee through action. When Lokasaranga Muni returned to the temple he found that the temple gate was myteriously closed against him. He called aloud upon the priests by name one by one to open the door but no one was within and yet the door remained closed. It was time for the worship yet there was no access to the temple. All were overcome with fear and amazement. There was an earnest searching of the heart for each one thought that he might have unwittingly committed some error and drawn upon himself the divine wrath.

Lokasaranga Muni was the culprit who was responsible for this, he was struck with remorse for all that he had done to Tiruppan, he hurt a devotee of the Lord and whoever hurts a devotee hurts the Lord. As to confirm him in his self accusation he heard a voice say "You have hurt me in my devotee, unless you repent, beg his pardon and carry him back on your shoulder round the temple the door of the temple shall remain closed against you".

Lokasaranga Muni then wended his way to the ghat and perceived Tiruppan at his accustomed place. He was afraid that fresh trouble was in store for him. He said with folded hands to Lokasaranga Muni "Revered sir, please do not defile your body, I have committed an offence by being born in a low caste,' I deserve punishment, please punish me by pelting stones at me from a distance". Lokasaranga Muni now realised the folly and depth of sin. The grace of the Lord was sufficient to bring about a reconciliation. The contrite Lokasaranga Muni caught hold of Tiruppan albeit against his will and circumbulated the temple carrying him on his shoulder. After he had expiated in this way the wrong done by him the temple gate opened and Tiruppan was carried at the head of a triumphant procession into the Divine pressence to receive all the temple honours.

It was thus Tirrupan was blessed with the vision of Lord Ranganath. The sight of the Lord filled his heart with ecstasy. He uttered ten verses describing the beauty and glory of the Lord. Immediately after this his utterance failed, his soul merged in Ranganath. These songs hold a very high place n Vaisnava literature. Vedanta Desikan wrote a commentary on this.

After this incident the current changed. The untouchable not only became a touchable but a saint revered and worshipped. Since then Tiruppan came to be known as Munivahan. Thus it came to pass in the fulness of time that a new temple came to be errected in honour of Tiruppan next to the Lord Ranganath. Since then the Brahmins too worshipped the Peria saint daily with flowers, sandal paste and other accessories along with the worship of Lord Ranganath probably to expiate the sin heaped together for ages by hating God in the poor, in the lowly and in the so-called untouchable.

Glory unto Lord Ranganath who showed through this incident that devotion to God can do wonders. Every body is great. None should be despised. Every form is the form of God. Hatred to His creation is hatred to God. Love alone is the conveyance to cross the ocean of the world.

TIRUMANGAI

Alwar's life is eventful. It is a contribution to the renaissance of devotion. Their songs addressing God as their beloved one, a sweet efforescence of divinity have a permanent place in literature. These songs mirror the content of their mind reflecting fears and disappoinments, hopes and joys, humour and seriousness, love and sympathy in the pages of these verses. The saint expresses his feeling of the touch of the eternal in the quivering of the blades of grass, in the twinkling of the dew drop, in leaves of the thick forest, in the whisper of the flowing rivulet, in the brighteness of the sun as well as in the pulsating heart of devotees. In their zeal they befriend birds and animals to act as the messenger of their beloved, their lives show that they are inspired poets, their inspiration springs from the lasting bliss of devotion.

Love is a great factor. When wrongly directed it turns one into a sinner but properly guided it can transform even a sinner into a saint. Strange are the ways of God. He bestows His love to all, the sinners and the saints are same to Him, the sinner of today becomes the saint of tomorrow. Unlike the Devil who seeks slaves and demands obedience He claims love and seeks comrades to manifest His glory. He wants His temple to be built of love people build temple of stones. Whomsoever He wishes He converts to His comradeship whether he is a robber or a devotee, He sees the mind.

Tirumangai was a robber, he became a devotee by the grace of God. Very little of his early life is known. He was born in the eight century A. D. of a Kolba father. He was known as Neelon (blue) because of his complexion, their caste took the profession of fighting so the science of warfare was mastered by him. By his valour he earned the reputation in the army of the Cola king, he rose to the rank of a commander-in-chief and afterwards became the head of Tirumangai region under the sovereignty of the Cola king. Wealth and position brought for him the chance to fill the gap of worldly pleasure full to the brim. Young damsels entertaining him with singing and dancing surrounded him. In this way he was captivated by the beauty of Kumudavalli, the daughter of a physician while she was giving a dance recital in a local temple. He approached her father for her hand but she who was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu refused to marry any one who had not even a Vaisnava mark, Another condition of the marriage was that he who would marry her would have to feed one thousand and eight

Vaisanvas daily. To get her as his beloved he was immediately initiated by a Vaisnava Acharya, got special Vaisnava mark and devoted heart and soul to fulfill the other demand also and finally married her.

Feeding one thousand and eight Vaisnavas daily is a tremendous affair. When all his wealth was spent away by this he continued his charity by borrowing. That was not enough, he failed to clear his debt and tax to the Cola king. Infuriated by this the king invaded his region but his army had to court defeat before Tirumangai's valour and martial talents. Finding no other means to bring him under control the Cola king met him in the garb of a Vaisnava and had him arrested by tricks and put him into prison. Tirumangai lamented for his failure to serve the Vaisnavas which he was doing so long and prayed for this to God who appeared to him in dream and asked him to proceed to Conjeeveram where he would get the necessary amount to obtain his release and continue his daily routine of service. With the permission of the Cola king he came to Conjeeveram, unearthed some hidden treasure, paid off his debts and started his service as before. But this wealth too was not sufficient to maintain the service long. When he found no other means to continue the work he took to high way robbery.

It is interesting to know how God showerd His grace upon him even though he took to a very disgraceful method. It is said that once going to plunder the palace of a king he entered a Vishnu temple. The presiding deity of the temple was decorated with very valuable ornaments all studded with costly jewels and diamonds. Tirumangai removed all except one which was so close round the flower-like-finger of the deity that all his attempts to remove it with his hand failed.

At last he tried to remove it with the aid of his teeth. As as soon as the teeth touched the finger of the deity divine wisdom flashed within him. Immediately he turned mad with the love of God, sang in ecstasy the glory of God, composed more than thousand verses which are known as Tirumoli (sacred utterances). There is another version of the story which is equally interesting. It is said that Lord and His consort both decorated with costly jewels from head to foot walked in in human form on the earth along a street when Tirumangai happened to meet them. Covetted by the most valuable ornaments he stopped the pair and forced them to part with their belongings. Like the commoner they did not raise any hue or cry for forcible snatching of the jewels rather they showed willingness for it. There was one ring on the toe of Lord Vishnu, which could not be removed with his hand despite all his endeavour to remove it. Then he removed it with the aid of his teeth. He made a bundle of the ornaments and wanted to run away with it to evade arrest. But it was too heavy. Suspecting a foul play on the part of his captive he asked in a fit of rage 'have you kept me spell bound with any mantram.' The captive admitted and said 'yes, I shall teach you mantram of divine power'. So saying he initiated Tirumangai. The touch of the Lord instantaneously wrought a spiritual awakening in him, the robber became the staunch devotee. The touchstone turns the iron into gold.

Tirumangi became a robber under forces of circumstances. He was a genius and was born with good Samskaras, poetry was his favourite thing. He used to visit temples of God and go on pilgrimages. Charmed by his lofty mindedness and personality four persons all endowed with special miraculous power became his disciples and were always travelling with him in all places of pilgrimages. Tola Volakkan, the first disciple was endowed with special power of controversy, none could defeat him in it. His second disciple Talludhuvans had special power to open any lock by mere puff of his breath without the help of any key. His third disciple Nilalai Mithippan was specially gifted with stopping any person by simply catching hold of his shadow. Neemal Nadappan, his fourth disciple could stroll on water at ease as he could on land. With these special powers they could accomplish wonders.

On a certain occasion travelling along with his diciples on places of pilgrimage Tirumangai came to visit the temple of Ranganath which was situated on the bank of the river Cauvery and was surrounded by thickets and forests and a haunt of bats, birds etc. The pitiable sight of the deity in a delapidated temple pained him very much and he took a vow to remove the plight of the deity. The thought that the Lord of the universe stood uncared in a lonely forest without service and worship and the temple surrounded by wild animals like jackals and wolves for fear of whom even the priest would not dare to attend regularly, pricked his heart. After consultation with his disciples he decided to raise money for it by begging from the rich, but he was totally disappointed when he began to collect fund for the noble purpose, there was no response from the people, he could not collect a single coin, what was worse he acquired a very sad experience, he was insulted by those who even began to insult him as thief. So circumtances compelled him to resort to other method.

This ill treatment of the rich could not dissuade Tirumangai to serve God by building a suitable temple for His worship, his heart was now filled with the fire of wrath, he became relentless as thunderbolt. He instigated his disciples not to lick the feet of the rich who are atheists and heretics but to humble those who rob the poor. They decided to rob the rich and spend their wealth for the temple of the Lord and serve the poor.

All the four disciples then utilized their miraculous powers. Their conspiracy succeeded fully. The first disciple would engage the rich and his attendants in a wrangle to give chance to the other disciples to fulfill their purpose. The second would, with a mere puff of his breath, open the lock however secured it might be. By this the rich man's treasure was open to them. The third disciple would touch with his feet the shodow of his rich victim so that his power of movement was lost. In this way Tirumangai with the help of the miraculous power of his disciples became the leader of a big gang. This method brought immense wealth which began to be stored up in a secret place.

After this he devoted his attention to the construction of the temple of Ranganath. He spent huge sums, brought the best sculptors and architects from different parts of the country. First he began sanctum sanctorum, the ring of the wall encirling it was completed in two years. Thousands of architects worked day and night to finish the construction of the inner apartment, four years for outer apartment, six years for the construction of the second ring, eight years for third, ten years for the fourth, twelve years for the fifth and eighteen years for the last set of apartments. The construction took sixty years to complete. Tirumangai was now sufficiently old and his disciples too became old.

When success comes means are not taken into consideration much. After the construction of the inner apartments the rich and the kings were convinced that Tirumangai was a sincere devotee. They then helped him probably through fears of being looted with money and the services of their own sculptors and architects. His way of work brought good days for the poor as hereafter they had not to suffer from starvation.

He was a good pay master, he would always keep his employees satisfied with regular payments. Though he took up robbery he never shared a single pie of the plunder. He used to live a very simple life on begging, cook it with his own hands and take it. He achieved mastery over his senses, his love of God was so intense that tears rolled on from his eyes and his heart melted with the joy of godliness.

After the completion of the temple Tirumangai rewarded the architects profusely. Not a single coin was left in his hand. But the robbers who were his accomplices demanded money of him, they conspired to kill him if their demand was not fulfilled. Neermal Nadappan to whose ear Tirumangai whispered something engaged in the mean time a very big boat and started with the band of robbers to the northern shore of the river Cauvery to share the supposed huge hidden treasure. It was rainy season, the deep water of the river was flowing with torrential speed, at the approach of evening the sky was overcast with dark cloud. It looked as much midnight. Tirumangai and the disciples were waiting patiently for the news of robbers. All on a sudden they heard a horrible cry of distress from the bossom of the river and then all was silent, the boat could no more be seen.

After a short while Neermal Nadappan walked over the water, appeared before his guru Tirumangai, bowed down before him and reported what had happened in the midstream. Tirumangai felt a sign of relief and said 'Dont worry for them, they are blessed, they have all gone to Lord Ranganath who has given them a shelter in His lap at Vaikunta.

He then changed his plan of work and said to his disciples 'we should henceforeward give up the profession of robbery, the purpose for which we adopted this method is over. Let us hereafter pass our days in the servicc of God and meditation on Him.' What they decided they did in practice. It was thus how the dangerous robbers became staunch devotees. In course of time God gave them shelter to His lap.

The place of death of the thousand robbers in the northern bank of the river Cauvery is still known as Kellindan (Colaroon) i. e. the place of murder.

MANIKAVACAKAR

There are innumerable temples big and small scattered all over India which testify to Hinduism as a living faith where the temple tower shoots upward as the visible symbol of one pointed aspiration. Of these temples the larger parts are to be found preserved intact in the south of India. The reason for it is that most of the bigger temples in north India were destroyed by the foreign invaders whose main task in India, as history shows, was to crush any culture which was not their own. One such magnificent monument of the living faith of Hinduism is the Avadiyar koil (temple). This ancient temple in the district of Tanjore enshrines the memory of a great saint for it was here that the great saint Manikavacakar got the blessings of his guru and practised a life of spiritual austerity in order to realize the goal of life. Even today the image of the saint which is preserved in the temple receives the worship of the devotees.

The truth of Vedanta philosophy have been expressed in the language of the people by Manikavacakar in his famous work called Tiruvacakam which is held in as much reverence as the Thevarams attributed to the other three great saints Appar, Sundarar and Tirujnana Sambandar. While the Thevarams are redolent with devotion the Tiruvacakam is remarkable for its intellectual appeal. Hence is its appeal to all those who seek in religion the eternal values of life. This great luminary of the south and path finder of innumerable devotees and aspirants, showed within the short span of thirty two years of his life, by his love and devotion to God that the ephemeral world is unreal and that indifference, godliness, confidence in the glory of God alone are real and that God realization is the end of life. Devotion to God, sincerity, austerity, truth are the the means to this realisation.

We do not have much in record which will give us an insight into the early life of Manikavacakar. All that we know of him is that he was born of a Brahmin parentage and that he spent his early years at Tiruvadakur which is not far from Tanjore. His parents called him Vadabura. We do not know any thing definite about the date of his birth ; but we find reference to him in the Thevarams which are generally attributed to the seventh century A. D. It is generally presumed that Manikavacakar must have lived at least a hundred years earlier i. e. in the fifth or sixth century A. D. From his famous song sequence the Tiruvacakam we may deduce that he was fully acquainted with the Vedas and other scriptures and that he was a man of brilliant intellect. He was like fire covered by ashes. The reputation of his learning and personality spread far and wide.

As a young man he seemed to have attracted the attention of the court where he rose rapidly. He became the Prime minister of Arimardan, the ruling Pandya king of Madura. As he was by nature of a religious bent of mind he discharged his duties with seriousness of purpose never allowing himself to be swayed from the path of rectitude by the power politics of those days. In the midst of tremendous activities he maintained his mental peace. What ever time he could spare from public affairs he spent in the contemplation of God.

It is said that Arimardan, the Pandya king was fond of horses. He heard that some one had brought at Perundurai in Tanjore, a number of very fine Arab horses for sale. The king sent his minister with a large sum of money in order to effect the transaction. On his way through the jungle the minister spent his night at a neighbouring temple. The chanting of the Vedas came floating in the air. He proceeded towards the place whence the sound came and there he saw an aged Brahmin instructing his pupil in the Vedas. That was to be a deciding moment in life. He prayed to the preceptor of the Vedas to be gracious towards him and to receive him as an humble disciple. His prayer was granted, grace poured on him. The Brahmin initiated the eager disciple and opened the portal of liberation to him. All of a sudden the minister began spontaneously to chant the hymns of prayer which were so beautiful, rythmic, pure, full of devotion and transferent like jewels that they attracted the attention of his guru and he gave him the name of Manikavacakar. The fire of spirituality in him was kindled by the grace of God and guru which helps the lame to cross the mountain and the dumb speak. His latent Samskaras came to manifest themselves. From being a mere servant of the Pandya king he came to realize in what relation he stood to Him who is the king of kings. And from that time onward he entered upon a life of austere meditation, his angle of vision changed, he forgot about his previous responsibility, the money he had with him was spent in the service of Siva.

Meanwhile the news reached the Pandya king who had been waiting for the famous breed of horses. He turned his anger upon the minister and had him imprisoned upon a charge of embezzlement of public money. The king asked him when the horses would be coming ; the minister uttered one word 'Avani' which means the month of Sravan. The answer did not satisfy the king yet he was waiting impatiently for the month of 'Avani' and indeed a strange event took place. Some one brought before the month was over a number of very fine horses and they were lodged for the night in the royal stable along with other horses. Some hold that by the grace of the Lord Siva a miracle took place. The very jackals which haunt the cremation ground had been turned into horses and they were lodged in the royal stable. Overnight they became their original selves and bit the horses in the stable and ran away after making a frightful din after the manner of jackals.

The king turned his anger upon Manikavacakar, had his guard redoubled and ordered physical torture on him so that the ex-minister might expiate in prison for his total disregard of the laws of the state. But the saint remained unperturbed, bore all with patience without a word of protest against the brutal inhuman treatment. He submitted everything to the will of God who cannot remain a mere spectator in a terrible injustice like this. He does not allow His defenceless devotees to suffer in vain. Before long the Vaigai river which skirts the city of Madura rose in flood and threatened to wipe out the palace and the city of Madura. At last the king realized the folly of heaping indignity upon the devotees of the Lord and he had Manikavacakar released. It is needless to add that the divine wrath subsided and the flood abated.

After his release from prison Manikavacakar went on a pilgrimage to various centres of religion in south India and at every place he composed a song in praise of the Divine Presence enshrined in the temple. The song he composed in the glory of God Siva at Tirupendurai was specially remarkable for the spirit of devotion and its melody of expression. After visiting other places he arrived at Chidambaram.

In those days Chidambaram was a notable place of Buddhist learning. A Buddhist monk from Ceylon stood out as the protogonist of his creed and challenged all to a logical disputation. The arena of intellectual combat was to be the royal presence. It may be stated in passing that the king had a daughter who was born dumb and she too was present at the hall of disputation. The eloquence of Manikavacakar was so compelling that the Buddhist monk was reduced to silence. The king congratulated Manikavacakar on his great victory. He had however one request to make. He wished to know if Manikavacakar could also perform the other miracle of making the dumb daughter eloquent. The saint prayed to the Lord Siva and then asked the daughter to answer some questions properly. By the grace of the Lord, Manikavacakar restored the power of speech to the daughter of the king and she spoke so sweetly and so well that no one could ever suspect that she was born dumb. In this way Manikavacakar became the instrument of speading the divine glory and of rallying round Hinduism the wavers and the doubters. That is why Manikavacakar is even now worshipped as one of the sixty three noble saints or Nayanars of south Indian Saivism.

After this, it is said, that the people of Chidambaram requested him to explain to them in detail the nature of his philosophy. He took them to the temple at Chidambaram and pointing to the image of Nataraj said "The Deity is the object of my song, the source of my inspiration, He is my language, my ideas, my metre and He is the meaning of my song." So saying he merged in the Deity and became one with the Divine. After this no body could find his body out. The mystery of the body is still undecided.

Manikavacakar has to his posterity the great legacy of his work the Tiruvacakam. The Tiruvacakam like the Thevaram is a song sequence and chanted in the temples of the south India as a part of the ritual of worship.

We may say in the main that he brought to the common people the philosophy of the Upanishads which is enshrined in the sacred language and which was accessible to those who were willing to undergo the necessary discipline. He brought philosophy from heaven to earth. The following episode will bring out in a remarkable manner its appeal on the people. There was a Roman catholic preacher, Rev G. W. Pope who came to south India and learnt Tamil in order to convert people to his faith but so great was the appeal of Tiruvacakam that in his last days the preacher of Christianity was specially interested in bringing out an English translation of the famous classic. The converter was himself converted. We shall conclude our study of Manikavacakar with an extract from one of his poems "I am not afraid of being reborn, nor am I afraid of death. I seek no enjoyment in Paradise nor do I seek any of the good things below. May the glory of the Lord be the object of my contemplation and eternal heritage".

TIRUJNANA SAMBANDAR

Blessed is that person who is endowed with devotion from boyhood and who has understood that God realization is the goal of life. Unless one has acquired good Samskaras one cannot be endowed with such qualities, for they are the results of accumulated benefits of previous lives. Blessed are the parents too who have such devoted sons. It is said that of the three types of sons such as the unborn and the dead and the foolish the first two categories are perferrab'e to the last; for the misery caused by them is short lived whereas the troubles which the foolish ones create last as long as they are alive. That is why parents always pray to God to have good sons specially devoted sons.

A tender boy was going to a temple along with his father. He was so tender that he could hardly walk long distance. His father was a devoted and enthusiastic soul. Out of love for the boy he carried him on his shoulder so that he might not feel the fatigue of the journey. Although the boy was of tender years he had the good sense to see that he was giving unnecessary troubles to his father and he begged his father's permission to be allowed to walk along with him. But the way was long and more than he could endure. When the party approached the Siva temple of Tirumaranpadi night fell. It looked as though the boy was favoured by the presiding deity of the temple for early next morning by the command of the Lord who had appeared in a vision the temple authorities placed at the disposal of the boy the temple palanquin and the temple umbrella in order that he might continue his pilgrimage.

The tender boy whom Lord Siva had thus favoured is the hero of our story, the saint Tirujnana Sambandar. The term 'Tiru' is the equivalent of the Sanskrit word 'Sri' and is used as an honorific prefix. The life of the saint is given in Peria Puranam which gives the lives of sixty three saints. We learn from the book that Tirujnana Sambandar came of a respectable Brahmin family. From his boyhood he was blessed with God knowledge. It is said that the great Sankaracharya who is considered to be an incarnation of Siva specially refers to Tirujnana Sambandar in the seventy sixth stanza of his Soundarya Lahari.

Siyali or Sirkali to be more correct is a small town in the district of Tanjore. It lies at a distance of one hundred and sixty two miles from Madras. Mayavaram is the nearest railway junction. In this town there lived a pious Brahmin named Sivapadahridayar. He was a great devotee of Lord Siva. He had mastered the four Vedas and he spent his time in the worship of Siva. He had married a young and beautiful Brahmin girl named Bhagavati who was as pious as her husband. At that time Hinduism was struggling for existence against the powerful Jain and Buddhist influences, who by some means or other had converted a large number of Hindus to their faith. This wounded the heart of Sivapadahridayar and he prayed fervently to Lord Siva that he might be blessed with a son who would be powerful enough to curb the growing influence of Jainism. It was in response to this prayer that the great saint came to be born.

In the course of time Bhagavati presented him a beautiful son with all the auspicious marks on his body thus indicating the bright future that was reserved for him. On studying the horoscope of the boy the astrologers declared that the boy would be short-lived, that he would live only for a period of eight years and that if he became a preacher within that time he would live for eight more years and do wonders within that short time. And the prophecy came true; for within that short period he created such a stir in the religious world that it has no parallel in history. This God-given child was able to compose devotional songs even at the age of three. The songs which he composed came to be collectively known as 'Thevaram' which means a garland of songs composed in honour of God.

It is said that on one occasion Sivapadahridayar went to the tank in the neighbouring Siva temple in order to have his bath. As his tender boy also wished to accompany him he took him along with him. When the father was bathing the child saw the images of Parvati and Siva in the temple and began to cry loudly 'Appa' 'Amma' calling upon father and mother. The presiding deities of the temple were pleased with his earnest entreaty and blessed him with the vision divine. His heart was full with bliss. Siva thought that the boy might be hungry and asked Parvati to feed him. She fed him her milk and along with it fed him with the knowledge of God. Thus he came to be endowed with Jnana or Divine knowledge. Hence his name is Tirujnana Sambandar murty swamigal. When his father returned from his bath and on finding traces of milk on his lips wished to know who it was that fed him;

he apprehended that some mischievous person might feed his boy and that it might endanger his life. Thereupon the boy pointed to the figure of Siva in the temple and sang a song in praise of Siva. The song contained the idea "With the order of the deity of the temple, who came stealthily like a thief to steal my heart, who wears ear rings of poisonous snakes, who rides on his bull vehicle, whose head shines with the beautiful bright moon and who besmears his body with the ashes of burning ghat, Bhagavati, the mother of the universe, fed me her breast milk". Thereupon the father came to know the nature of the Divine Lila. The lofty ideas, the correct metre used in the melodious song confirmed this conviction and he bowed to God in gratitude. He now felt sure that his prayer was answered and that his son would be instrumentral in the revival of Hinduism.

With the lapse of time the divine nature of the boy began to manifest itself more and more clearly. It so happened that once Tirujnana Sambandar was singing the glory of Lord Siva at Tiruvellekar temple keeping time with his hands, all of a sudden a pair of golden cymbals fell from on high so that he might make use of it for similar purpose in the future. In this way his name and fame spread far and wide. His depth of devotion and his marvellous power of expression drew innumerable devotees around him. It is said that he went on pilgrimage four times round the Tamil country visiting in all two hundred and seventy five Siva temples and wherever he went he composed songs in praise of the presiding deity of the place. These songs came to be known as Thevaram, the garland of songs which have contributed so much to the enrichment of Tamil literature.

One of the special characteristics of Tirujnana Sambandar was his deep love for devotees specially those who accompanied him and took part in the revival of Hinduism through the preaching of the glory of God. One such person was the famous musucian Tirunilakanta Perampanar who used to accompany him and play on his Vina while Tirujnana Sambandar sang. It was this combination of noble words wedded to great music that specially appealed to all ; it left a deep impression in their mind and roused their depth of devotion. But it brought in its wake troubles also. Jealousy breeds even in the air, the relatives of Tirunilakanta were jealous of the saint, they wished to discredit him and curb his influence, according to them the influence of the saint was due to the playing on the Vina by Tirunilakanta, the divine character and devotional songs did not appeal to them. This narrowness on the part of his relatives pained Tirunilakanta very much and he requested the saint to compose a song which could not be played on the Vina. The saint did not know that the relations of the Vina player were interested in discrediting him. In order to oblige Tirunilakanta he composed a song which could not be played on the instrument. The Vina expert felt abashed. Disgusted with the behaviour of his relatives Tirunilakanta was about to break the musical instrument which was the cause of this discontent but the saint relieved the situation by taking the instrument in his hand and by playing perfectly upon it himself to the great astonishment of all. After this he praised the expert playing of the Vina very much and returned the instrument to the owner. The jealoussy of his relatives then subsided. It may be mentioned here that whenever Tirujnana Sambandar sang a song in praise of God the words came from the depth of his heart and the assembled people felt as though the voice came from the presiding deity of the temple.

As has been stated before Tirujnana Sambandar took four rounds of pilgrimages all over the Tamil country. The first time he travelled to places near Siyali. He was carried on the shoulder of his father until by the grace of Siva the jewelled palanquin and the umbrella of the Tirumaranpandi temple were placed at his disposal. The second time he travelled to places of pilgrimages on both sides of the Cauvery in the Cola country. The third round of pilgrimages took him to the Pandya country of which Madura is the centre. His fourth round of pilgrimages took him to Conjeeveram and other places in Pallava country.

The life of Tirujnana Sambandar is full of miraculous happenings. On one occasion when he visited the Siva temple at the Mallanad village some one whose daughter was suffering from an incurable disease brought her to be cured by the sage. The saint composed a song and prayed to Lord Siva that her disease might be cured and in an instant she regained her health. This incident proves that the grace of God is the best medicine and that this saving grace comes to our rescue when all other medicine fails.

On another occasion when Tirujnana Sambandar was travelling on the banks of the Cauvery he came to know that Sirutondar, the well known devotee was living nearby. The boy saint met him and embraced him and composed some songs in his honour. Sirutondar and his wife rosolved that they would not take their food without feeding any devotee of Siva. On one occasion no such guest could be found although Sirutondar was eagerly waiting by the way side if any guest was coming. In the mean time there was a knock at the door announcing the arrival of a guest. The wife of Sirutondar invited the guest but the guest would wait for the master of the house for it was a principle with him that he would not enter any house where there was no male member, so he preferred to finish his bath in the mean time till the return of the master. Returning home disappointed without any guest when Sirutondar came to know about the said guest he was very glad and welcomed him heartily. The guest had some peculiar tastes, he took food only once in six months and was accustomed to meat eating, he had a special liking for human flesh especially of tender children. Offering the flesh of the only son on the part of Sirutondar was unthinkable, dishonour to the respected guest was also unthinkable. He was in two horns of dilemma. This reminds one of the conditions of Karna and his wife Padmavati of the Mahabharat from whom God himself in the guise of a Brahmin guest demanded similar sacrifice. It is said that Sirutondar and his wife cooked their only son and offered his flesh as food for the guest. The guest however would not take his food in the absence of the master's son. At the command of the guest Sirutondar went to the garden and called his son by name. The boy came running, the dead came to life and when they turned to the guest to thank him they found that the guest had vanished. Such was the story of Sirutondar, the devotee to whom Siva himself, the giver of life and death came as Vikshandeswar in which form He is worshipped even to day at Siyali.

After passing some days in the company of Sirutondar, Tirujnana Sambandar wished to proceed on his way. But Sirutondar was eager to be included among his entourage; and in this way when the two were travelling the saint Appar also joined the party. As each was coming in his palanquin both Tirujnana Sambandar and Appar got down from their respective palanquins in order that each might be the first to salute the other. Appar was senior in age; Tirujnana Sambandar was a Brahmin by caste. In this strange meeting of the devotees all normal rules were set aside, for the senior made a namaskaram to the junior and the Brahmin to one who was outside his caste. The devotees of God are above all caste restrictions and above all social regulations; for the whole world bows before a Yati, the man of renunciation.

It is said that when Tirujnana Sambandar and Appar visited the famous Siva temple at Vedaranyam they found the temple door closed. When Tirujnana Sambandar composed a song and sang it the temple door opened mysteriously. It was in memory of this incident that the particular Thevaram which he sang is chanted as part of the daily ritual in the temple at Vedaranyam even to this day.

In the course of perigrinations Tirujnana Sambandar came to the famous city of Madura, the seat of the Pandya king. Madura was then ruled by a Jaina king named Kunapadya. Because of his patronage Jainism naturally found a place as the favoured reilgion. They tortured the Hindus and converted thousands of them into their faith by magical rites and other methods. Queen Mangarkarsi and the prime minister Kulashekhar were alike Hindus and were devotees of Siva and it was at their request that Tirujnana Sambandar came to Madura. The Jains were afraid of losing the patronage of the king, they conspired together and thought that they would get rid of the saint by setting fire to the house where he was staying. When the house caught fire Tirujnana Sambandar came out and sang a song in praise of Lord Siva and at once the fire was quenched.

In fact the evil which the Jains had set in motion recoiled on them ; for they all began to suffer and the king himself who had connived at it was himself the victim of a burning fever. It found no cure despite all attempts by Jain priests to cure him by magical rites. At the request of the queen and the entreaty of the minister the king submitted to Tirujnana Sambandar and accepted him as his spiritual guide. The sage thereupon composed a song in praise of Lord Siva as the best medicine, the best mantra and the best tantra and gave the Vibhuti to the king. On receiving the sacred Vibhuti as Prasadam the king's malady was cured. But the Jains were still unconvinced. They offered to submit to an ordeal by fire a poem composed by themselves as against another poem composed by Tirujnana Sambandar. But the palm leaf on which the Jains wrote their poem was reduced to ashes in an instant while the leaf on which the saint wrote his poem remained in tact untouched by fire. Though the Jains were defeated once again they were not willing to acknowledge it. They begged pardon of the king, persuaded him not to leave their fold as in the absence of their patron their fold might get extinct. They invited Tirujnana Sambandar to one more trial of strength. Close to the town of Madura flows the river Vaigai which during rainy seasons assumes turbulent proportions. The Jains invited Tirujnana Sambandar to write a song in praise of Siva. They themselves offered to write another in praise of their Arhat. Whichever floats against the current and proceeds upstream is to be declared as the winning side. The song composed by Tirujnana Sambandar stood the test while what the Jains wrote was swept away by the current. Henceforth the king of Madura openly accepted Hinduism as his state religion to the great joy of queen Mangarkarsi and prime minister Kulashekhar who were devout Hindus. The king got ample proof of the hypocrisy of the Jains and their unnecessary torture on the Hindus. He ordered punishment of the mischief mongers. As a result thousands of Jains fled away through fear to other places, some were punished for criminal offence. It was thus that the influence of the Jains were curbed because of their insincerity and lack of spiritual fervour.

From Madura Tirujnana Sambandar proceeded further south, he came via Rameswar to Patimongai, a colony of the Buddhists and this time he, at the request of upright devotees engaged the Buddhists in a religious controversy. The Hindu faith was represented by one of the followers of the saint, who worsted the Buddhists by his superior logic and spiritual acumen.

Tirujnana Sambandar came in the course of his Vijaya yatra to several places in the north of the Tamil country such as Kalahasti where the grace of Siva had descended upon the hunter sage Kannappar. He came to the ancient Siva temple of Kapaliswar in Mylapore which is a part of the city of Madras. At that time there lived a rich merchant named Sivanesan Chetty. He had an only daughter named Pumbabai who too was a devotee of Siva. One day while she was plucking flowers for worship, a poisonous snake bit her, she died, her father preserved her bones in a golden casket, offered food and drink before it, people thought that he became mad after the loss of his only daughter. When Tirujnana Sambandar came to know of the incident he asked Sivanesan Chetty to bring the casket before him, he composed a song in praise of Siva and by the grace of the Lord restored her to life. This incident was responsible for the conversion of many Jains and Buddhists to Hinduism. It is said that

Sivanesan Chetty offered his daughter in marriage to the saint but the saint declined the offer and asked her to lead a religious life of nun dedicated to prayer and service of God.

While his labours were done Tirujnana Sambandar returned to his native place of Siyali. The Brahmins of the locality thought that Tirujnana Sambandar should marry and take upon himself the duties of a householder as enjoined by the scriptures. He seemed to yield to their entreaty. As the sacrificial fire was kindled Tirujnana Sambandar prayed to Siva. The sacrificial fire turned into a raging fire which enveloped the whole place. Tirujnana Sambandar said 'The gates of liberation are open now, let us enter it', with that he entered the sacrificial fire with his newly wedded bride and became merged in the eternal. The passing away of the saint was as miraculous as his appearance. Within the short span of sixteen years he had brought about a remarkable religious revival and has re-established the spiritual union of Bhakti with Jnana and of sublime thought wedded to music. Singing was a spiritual experience to him, he seemed to sing with mind through the body, skill in singing was form of self control, the principle of singing disciplined his body to the music of the spheres. Music to him was the link between universal harmony and the harmony of the individual sailing on life's journey. Probably that is the reason why his Thevarams are very much appreciated and are sung in the Siva temples of the south.

His teachings may be summed up in a few words. According to him Siva is with form and without form, God is one and infinite, the light of light and descends in different forms at different places according to time and circumstances. Tirujana Sambandar's mission in life was universal welfare.

There was not the least trace of evil in him. It was his firm conviction that though God testifies His devotees and gives them temporary pain He gives them liberation and ultimate peace. God with form prefers devotion as a Sadhana for the attainment of ultimate liberation. God too wants the company of His devotees and by this He enjoys the depth of His own glory.

APPAR

In as much as society as formed by its members is based upon the division of labour, we can not evaluate any profession and say that it is high or low. We cannot say that the profession of the cultivator who produces wealth and makes life possible is lower than that of the Kshatriya who guards the country against attack from enemies or lower than that of the Brahmin who studies scripture and practises meditation. Every profession has its value. In a sense every one is a cultivator, human body is the most fertile soil. Every body cultivates his own body, the only difference is that the wise cultivator makes his body into the temple of the Lord. He sows the best seed of truth, pours water of devotion, removes the unwanted weeds of falsehood, protects it with the fencing of honesty and ultimately reaps the best harvest which is God realization and eternal peace. That is why Appar addressing his own body as it were says' oh my head, bow down to the Lord Siva, oh my eyes behold His glorious form, oh my ears, listen to His praise. He alone is our nearest and dearest, He alone is true. When death draws near He alone will extend

His saving grace. By His grace you have been granted human body, cultivate truth in this very body so that you are not to repent hereafter'.

Appar, the hero of our story was born of a family of cultivators but he attained such spiritual eminence that he is regarded as one of the first four among the sixty three Saivite saints of south India, who brought a revolution in the religious history of medieval India by their spiritual carriers and literary works and saved the country from chaos and godlessness. He was born about the beginning of the seventh century in a well known Vellata (cultivator) family in the village of Tiruvamoor in the district of south Arcot. His father's name was Pugalanar (famous man) and his mother's name was Mathiniar. Appar was his second son, he was originally, named Marunikear which means dispeller of darkness. He had an elder sister named Tilakvati, her husband Kalipagiar was the commander of any army under the Pallava kings. After her marriage his father died and his mother became a Satee. Thus Appar lost his parents early ; Kalipagiar also died in the battle, Tilakvati had a desire to follow the path of her mother but she gave up the resolve considering the miserable condition of her orphan brother ; it was she who brought up her young brother and spent her days in the meditation of God.

At that time Hinduism was fighting for its survival against the more powerful influences of Buddhism and Jainism. These latter faiths enjoyed royal support as well as popular favour. Magical rites performed for gaining some ends helped them in their easy conversion of the Hindus in their faiths. As a young boy Appar was kidnapped by a Jain, taken to some place at Pataliputra and was for a while forced to accept their religion. He practised austerity in the Jaina manner, wrote works in defence of their creed and was renamed by them as Dharmasena ; it is said that charmed by his personality and learning Mahendra Verma, the king of the Pallava dynasty gave his daughter in marriage but he was not happy in household life. Appar saw through the insincerity of the Jains and he himself came to suffer from acute colic. It was this colic that made him turn to the religion which he had forsaken for he was afraid that it might have been in the nature of a God-sent affliction for turning away from the true faith. One day Appar got chance to run away. In a mood of repentence he came back to his sister a sadder and wiser man. She too welcomed her repentent brother and the two prayed earnestly to the Lord Siva and after a while he was cured of colic completely. He was now determined to spend the rest of his life in the service of his Ista Siva.

The Jains tried their best to recapture Appar in order to teach him a lesson. They found him out with the help of the Jain king Kadar of Pallava kingdom. The persecution to which he was subjected reminds us of the story of Pralhada. He was thrown on the burning bricks, given poisonous drinks, allowed to be trampled by wild elephants. Although Ahimsa was the creed of the Jains they forgot their principles in their zeal but Appar stood the test and testified by his suffering to the truth of his creed and indeed the Lord was his strong defence in every trial and tribulation. Every time the Jains tried to afflict him Appar came out with a song to the glory of Siva, the saviour of the afflicted. The exasperated Jains tied a heavy stone round the neck of the saint and threw him into the sea but the Panchaksara mantra stood him in good stead and he was washed ashore at a place which came to be called

Karaiervittan-kuppam, the hamlet of the place where the Lord saved him and brought him ashore. Appar then reached the house of his sister who was engaged in the worship of the Lord Siva. When the king heard of the miraculous escape of Appar every time he became repentent and became a convert to Hinduism.

Appar whose devotion was thus sorely tried came in the end to be blessed with the vision of the Lord Siva. His heart was filled with the divine bliss and from that time he went from one holy place to another visiting the shrine of the Lord at various places and chanting His praise. It was by a happy turn of events that he met the saint Tirujnana Sambandar. Appar had joined the party which was carrying the palanquin of the famous saint and when Tirujnana Sambandar asked for Appar the latter cried out from beneath 'Here I am'. Tirujnana Sambandar immediately got down and prostrated before Appar and called him by the name of Appar which means 'father'. It was this title that came to be the permanent name of him till now known as Marunikear. In a sense the meeting of the two great souls was like the meeting of the Ganga and the Jamuna.

As in the case of Tirujnana Sambandar a number of miracles are recorded of Appar also. Thus there was a great admirer of Appar named Appudi Adigal who was a pious Brahmin. Out of admiration for the saint he had named his son after him. Thus when Appar in the course of pilgrimage came to Appudi Adigal he was invited to be his guest and accept his hospitality. Just then the son of Appudi Adigal who was sent to the garden to fetch the plantain leaf for the guest was bitten by a poisonous snake and died. The news was suppressed lest it should cause a breach of hospitality.

But the saint came to know of it and went to the garden. There he prayed to the Lord Siva and chanted a song in praise of Him. Thereupon the dead man revived and regained consciousness.

Appar was a great devotee of Lord Siva, he wished to visit several holy places from Kanyakumari in the south to places of pilgrimage in the Himalays. In the latter part of his life he wished to visit Mount Kailas and worship Siva. He proceeded on foot but was attacked with sore in the leg. The adamantine will in him made him crawl to reach the destination but within a sort time a greater obstacle stood on his way. The sore spread upto his hands. The greater the obstacle the firmer was the determination to visit the holy Kailas and see his Ista. He then proceeded by rolling when both hands and feet refused to move. It is said that even stones melt at the suffering of the devotees and show sympathy to them far less God who is ever ready to remove any thorn pricked at the foot of His devotees. At last the Lord Siva took pity on him. As Appar was worn out with fatigue and almost unable to stand he saw a monk before him who said that he would have a vision of his Ista if he took bath in the neighbouring tank. He did so and he saw the Mount Kailas and Lord Siva. The place where the Lord graced him is known as Tiruvaiyar and it lies about ten miles from Tanjore.

Appar lived for eighty years. The last days of his life were spent at Tirupugar in the service of the deity and in cleansing the temple compound. As he removed the grass from the temple compound he would find precious stones below but unmindful of earthly treasures he used to throw them out along with the weed.

Appar composed in all three hundred and twelve songs.

He sang the glory of God, of realization as the goal of life and of the means to realization. He has been a source of inspiration to every earnest aspirant. To the great devotee that he was Siva is the director of all beings and the very essence of all objects, the melody of songs, the sweetness of fruits, the scent of flowers come from Him. According to him this body is His moving temple ; devotion, truth, purity and love form his worship. The aspirant can see Him with the light of knowledge kindled by discrimination. He who can wipe out the desire of lust and money from his mind and control his senses can attain liberation by the grace of Siva. The obstacle to liberation is ego-consciousness striking against which the ship of spirituality goes deep to the bottom. By worship with 'Namo Sivaya' mantra a devotee can attain the goal of life which is liberation. His songs are sung in most of the temples in south India ; even parents in the south encourage their children to commit those songs to memory so that devotion may be kindled in their mind from boyhood. His songs are assets of the Tamil literature.

SUNDARAR

From the ancient times Hindu marriage is regarded as a sacrament and as an institution which provides the material basis for the spiritual advancement of an individual. Thus it was in the olden days before the modern idea of marriage as contract came to prevail. It was therefore in the fitness of things that the relations of Sundarar should select a proper bride for him. The scene was the marriage pavilion. A hitch arose just before the marriage function was about to begin. It looked as though destiny was taking a hand in directing the whole social drama in order to point out that the life of the world is transitory and that those who come with a divine mission in life must renounce all that which is transitory in order that they may be the chosen instrument of divine fulfilment. When Sundarar was about to enter the life of a householder by performing the necessary rituals connected with a marriage there appeared on the scene an aged Brahmin who claimed the bridegroom as his bondsman and declared that he had no right to enter upon matrimony without his consent. The marriage was temporarily postponed so that the authenticity of the document which he held forth was scrutinised. Upon scrutiny it was declared to be genuine and valid. The marriage was dropped and Sundarar was led by the aged Brahmin to the neighbouring Siva temple. Here he suddenly merged into the deity and became invisible. Sundarar realized that it was his Ista who had come in the guise of a Brahmin and who had claimed him as his own. He felt the spiritual atmosphere of the place and the high destiny to which he was called. He felt an ineffable sense of joy and he felt grateful to the Lord for His infinite mercy in having rescued him from becoming a slave to worldiness. He felt that he was the chosen instrument of God and that he could never be separated from the object of his worship.

Such was the life history of the hero of our story. Sri Sundarmurty Nayanar ranks among the Saivait saints. He was born in the early part of the ninth century at a village called Tirunavalur in the district of south Arcot about two hundred miles from Madras. He was born of a Brahmin family who had been devotees of Siva. As a boy he was remarkably beautiful as his very name indicates and he was properly educated in the Vedas as was customaıy in those days. And after that great incident in his life which marked him out as the chosen instrument of God.he visited on foot more than a hundred holy places and at each place he composed a devotional hymn in praise of Siva. It is said that his wandering took him as far as the west coast and that the king of the place Cheraman Perumal became one of his ardent devotees.

In the course of pilgrimage of the holy places of the south India he came to Tiruvatigi and was engaged in austere spiritual practice. We are told that he was granted a vision of his Ista who appeared to him in the form of an aged Brahmin. From that place he proceeded to the famous city of Chidambaram which had been for ages a centre of religion. There he heard a voice commanding him to go to Tiruvalur and seek shelter at the holy feet of the Lord Siva who is enshrined there. Here again he practised such severe austerity that his Ista was pleased and granted him a vision and blessed him. From that time forward Sundarar came to be a much honoured person.

The life of religion is, it is said, hard to traverse sharp as the razor's edge. Happy are they who are able to traverse the path unfaltering. As for others who try, fail and try again, all that we can say is that even then they, in so far as they harken to the call of the spirit as against the call of the flesh or the world, are to that extent blessed. Sundarar belonged to the latter category. During his stay at Vanmikanathan he married a Devadasi and lived with her for a while as a householder. He got into some financial difficulty as he had no fixed income. But somehow his wants were met and help came in an unexpected manner. Be that as it may Sundarar again started on pilgrimage and came to the famous temple of Tiruvottiyur near Madras. Here too he seems to have formed a matrimonial alliance with a farmer's daughter. It is difficult to give any satisfactory explanation of this. At about this time it is said that Sundarar totally lost his power of eye sight. This physical blindness brought to him the greater spiritual blindness into which he had fallen. With a stick in hand he stumbled his way to the shrine of Siva at Tiruvallur. Here he poured forth his heart's sorrow in song, he had but one thought in his mind, the thought of the Lord and he wended his way chanting the glory of the Lord to the sacred shrine of Ekambarnath at Conjeeveram. Here by the grace of the Lord the power of sight was partially restored, he could see with one eye and when he came to Tiruvallur again the other eye was able to function normally. It was about that time that the famaus Cheraman Perumal came to be acquainted with him. Together they travelled in various places of pilgrimage. When they reached at Tiruvanchiakulam the saint felt the great call, he wished to be alone in order to contemplate his Ista. It was to be the flight of the alone to the alone for it was here that he attained Mahasamadhi.

In the course of his life Sundarar composed about a hundred Thevarams. After having conquered the fleeting pleasures of the world he was able to realize the Divine as the eternal values of life. His life was at once an exhortation and an warning, it is a warning to those who stumble on the path and an exhortation to those who strive towards the goal.

RAMANA MAHARSHI

Venkataraman afterwards known as Ramana Maharshi of great fame was born on 30th December 1879 on the Ardra festival day which is a great occasion specially at Chidambaram He was the second son of Sundaram Iyer, a well-to-do Brahmin of the village of Tiruchi which is twenty miles away from Madura. The reputation of the Brahmin lawyer and of his wife Alagammal stood very high in that part of the country. After having studied at the local school for some time Venkataraman was sent to the school at Dindigal. When he was eight years of age his father died. After the passing away of his father he was brought up at Madura by his uncle Subbier. He studied in the local school at Madura for some years. Although he was a boy of extraordinary merit he did not make up progress in his studies.

Alagammal, the mother of Venkataraman spent her days in great anxiety for it was a family tradition with them that some member or other in the family would take to a life of renunciation when he was twenty or thirty years of age. She was afraid that her son, too, might take the same path, for it was a only a short time ago that an uncle of Sundaram Iyer had taken Sanyas. One day when Venkataraman heard from a relation of Arunachalam, the presiding deity of the famous Siva temple at Tiruvannamalai, his heart was filled with joy and he found a new meaning in the utterance of the word. Within a short time by the study of Periapuranam, a Tamil work which gives the life story of sixty three saints a wonderful change came over him, for it released the latent spiritual longings within him. He felt that life was linked with the

Divine by the bond of love, indifference to the world and self surrender to God.

One day when he was sitting in his room he felt all of a sudden the spectre of death, his very existences were blotted out, doctors failed and it looked as though all was over ; he experienced psychologically the whole process of death as though his body had been carried to the cremation ground and as though it were burnt to ashes. And yet strangely enough some thing remained and that was the witnessing consciousness for he remained as the withness of his death. It was that experience of death which opened before the young man the gate of immortality. His mind drifted towards meditation on God. He became indifferent to health, food and study. He went to the nearby temple of Meanakshi-Sundareswar the famous Siva temple and there he prayed while tears rolled down from his eyes. His indifferencc to his study drew upon him the scolding of his relations and teachers. It was in these circumstances that he left for Arunachalam at Tiruvannamalai on 29th August 1896. He had left home without informing any one of his relations but he wrote a letter that they should not waste money in searching after him. He had found his life's mission and that gave him a steady urge towards his goal, the sacred shrine of Arunachalam. When he reached the village of Mambalputtur his last pie was gone ; for the rest he had to walk. He reached the shrine of Virateswar and spent some time at prayer ; but the priest in the temple was eager to close the door and could not wait. Venkataraman was hungry and fatigued ; he was too tired even to approach some one for water and he lost consciousness. After regaining consciousness he found that some food was lying before him and he took it. Next morning after much difficulty he started once again for the Arunachala, hill whose top catches the rosy light of the dawn. On the way he obtained money by mortgaging his gold ear ring and he tore off the mortgage receipt in order to avoid the future anxiety.

The first of September 1896 was a memorable day for on that day Venkataraman reached Tiruvannamalai, his dream land and the famous place of Siva who manifests as the Jyotirlinga. Years of Tapasya passed by, much later he came out as the world famous Raman Maharshi who has bestowed his inestimable spiritual grace upon thousands of aspirants both in the east and the west. At the shrine of Subramanya he passed days and months in the meditation of God without caring for food and drink. He lived on the Panchamrita which is poured as Abisheka for the deity, water, sugar plantain fruits and curds consisting of milk. In the course of time he came to be known as the Brahman swami and people who went round the temple in Pradaksinam used to prostrate before him just as they did before other deities in the shrine.

One Uddandi Nainar, an aspirant who was living in a lonely cottage nearby became his first disciple although Brahman swami was neither talking nor giving instruction. After some time Annamalai Tambiran who was a roving monk used to collect some food by singing hymns from the Thevaram, the Tamil devotinal songs, bring it to the Brahman swami and share it with him and enjoy the peaceful atmosphere of his company. To avoid the crowd the Brahman swami shifted to the shrine of Gurumurthy as it was close to the residence of Annamalai Tambiram but here as usual the crowd gathered. Moreover the place was found to be unsuitable as it was full of ants and other creeping insects. The devotees erected a high wooden platform but he was not at all mindful of it. Brahman swami was indifferent to every thing including food and water. His hairs grew long and became matted. He grew so emaciated and weak that he could not move about without help. The control of food and the observance of silence were not part of the vow he had taken. The fact is that his body needed very little and he had very little to say. He did not however disregard the value of silence. Once he was meditating in a lonely garden and some thieves entered there in order to steal the tamarind from the trees. One of them suggested that the silent swami might betray them and they might as well pour some poison into his eyes. Brahman swami remained unperturbed and by the grace of God he was saved from peril.

Palani swami, a Malayalee devotee of Vinayaka came to serve the swami. He was himself a Sadhaka and he was told that the best kind of Sadhana he could perform was to serve the swami. The swami wrote with a piece of charcoal 'simple food is quite sufficient for the maintainance of the body'. When Annamalai Tambiram came and saw it he came to find out what the mother tongue of the swami was, of which he was in the dark so long. Another devotee Venkataram Iyer resolved that he would not move from the swami's place until his place and nationality were known. Moved by pity for him the swami said to him 'Venkataraman, Tiruchi'. It was in this way that the people came to know the identity of the swami. Palani swami who used to attend upon him brought a large number of religious books in Tamil and used to read them, though as a Malayalee his own acquaintance with Tamil was imperpect and Brahman swami used to explain them in his own wonderful way by indication.

To avoid the crowd Palani swami took the swami to the garden of Venkataram Iyer and there attended upon him for a period of six months. In the mean time the news of Venkataraman who had now come to be known as Brahman swami reached his native place. Subbier, the elderly uncle was dead and another relation Nelliappa Iyer who was a pleader came to see him. He was then thoroughly changed. He was wearing only a loin cloth and his hair had grown long and became matted. As Nelliappa Iyer did not succeed in persuading Venkataraman to return home he went away disappointed. After some time Palani swami was left to stay in the garden and Brahaman swami took his residence in a cave on the top of the hill so that he might be free to devote himself entirely to the life of devotion. He used to live on Madhukari (by begging morsal of food from door to door) ; while begging he never entered the house of any house holder, took food standing on the road side and came immediately to sit for meditation again.

Alagammal, the mother of the swami was impatient to see her son after so many years of separation. She wished to take him home. All her entreaties and tears were in vain. At the request of a devotee Brahman swami wrote a few lines on a piece of paper to console his mother. He informed his mother that God guides the destiny of every individual according to one's previous action. That which is to happen is bound to happen and that which is not to happen can never happen. Therefore the best course is to keep silent. The mother was disappointed. She realized that her son had become a changed man and that there was no use in persuading him to go back. In this way the saint spent two years and a half in leading a life of severe austerity at Tiruvannamalai. At the end of that period he took his residence at the Virupaksa cave at the foot of the hill. In the Ashram he led a normal life, took regular food and did not avoid crowd. On the Kartik festival when a great lamp is lighted on the top of the hill crowds of pilgrims used to gather; but now pilgrims came at all times. The cave itself is in the form of 'Pranava', the symbol of 'Aum' which is the symbol of the Absolute. Thus the sacred hill of Arunachala which Sankaracharya calls Mount Meru came to be even more sanctified by the presence of many holy men and knowers of Truth. The arrival of Brahman swami invited rush of crowd. The authorities of the Virupaksa temple took undue advantage of the situation and tried to collect some kind of pilgrim tax. When the swami came to know about it he left the place as a protest against this injustice; it resulted in the loss of their income; afterwards the tax was withdrawn. The fruits, milk and other things brought by pilgrims formed the daily food of Brahman swami and his party. Whatever was available was shared by all.

The swami composed a poem called Stavamala describing the offering of one's life at the feet of Arunachala Siva. It is said that on one occasion an elderly lame devotee was going round the hill with his crutches. He saw a beautiful Brahmin coming before him who remarked 'the stick is unnecessary'. At once the lame devotee cast away crutches and he came to realize that it was the grace of Siva which enabled him to walk like noral people.

Many people used to come to the swami in quest of instruction. Brahmana swami translated into Tamil the Vivekachudamani of Sankaracharya in order to instruct his devotee Seshier. Special mention may be made of another devotee Sivaprakasa Pillai. After he had suffered from domestic bereavement he came to the swami for some spiritual consolation and found peace and rest. There was also the woman devotee Sakshi Ammal. She had lost her husband, son and daughter and she came to the swami in quest of Upadesam which would give her sufficient fortitude to endure her lot in life. The grace of the guru brought peace to her. On another occasion an European visitor came to see the saint of Arunachala. He went upto the hill and lost his way. When he was extremely tired the saint himself came and guided him to the Ashram. When he narrated his experience others were struck with wonder for the swami had been talking to them all the time.

There came one wicked monk named Balananda who in order to exploit the goodness of the swami posed with closed eyes before others as a very great soul and declared before them that he was the guru and the guardian of the saint. In this way he collected money from people. As Brahman swami was silent without a word of protest others could not say anything to this self seeker. Palani swami's patience failed and he picked up a quarrel with him. When Balananda's behaviour went to the extreme he scolded the saint right and left and went to the length of spitting on the body of the swami he was mercilessly beaten by the inmates of the Ashram and driven away from there. After his departure calmness was restored. On a certain occasion a naked Sanyasin was staying in the Ashram for a week. He took some vow probably with some motive to fulfill some desire and kept his hand always up. One day he asked the saint about his future whether it would be bright or dark the swami bluntly replied that it would be as dark as the present. By this he sought to give an impression in the mind of questioner that physical torture is never helpful to the growth of spirituality.

One night some thieves entered the Ashram by breaking open the window. Raman Maharshi told his disciples that they should not obstruct the thieves. One of them hit the swami on the leg and blood flowed and yet the Maharshi remained calm. He asked devotees to tie up the Ashram dog and leave the Ashram so that the thieves might be free to steal whatever they chose. Emboldened by the non-violence of the Maharshi they demanded a light and they got it too, and they walked away with whatever they could get. The Maharshi told his disciples that they should not resort to the path of retaliation for that is not the way of the monks. His was the path of tolerance and forgiveness. Let the thieves follow their way of life and the monks their own if the thieves can not follow what is right there is no reason why the monks should deviate from what religion commands. If at an unguarded moment the teeth should bite the tongue should one pull out all one's teeth ?

To a saint of his calibre the ordinary distinction between good and evil no longer exists; he saw Atman in all whether it be in a thief or in a virtuous monk. They are merely different kinds of manifestations of the One Universal Spirit.

There was a famous scholar at that time named Ganapati Sastri. He was well versed in Kavya, Tarka and Vedanta. He practised Japa and had been on pilgrimage to several holy places but he had not yet found peace of mind. His quest after the solution to the problem of life brought him to Arunachala and to the feet of the saint of Arunachala. In reply to a question from Ganapati Sastri the saint looked at him calmly and then said, "If any one searches sincerely the source of the 'I'-consciousness and focusses one's attention upon that one can obtain peace, this search is penance'. The flow of bliss from the spoken words of the saint was in itself sufficient to remove the gloom of ignorance from the savant. He became a great devotee, wrote many works on the life and ideal of the guru and put into practice what was taught to him. It was this Ganapati Sastri who gave him the name of Ramana Maharshi though in the intimate circle of the Ashram he was merely known as Bhagavan.

One day when Ganapati Sastri was meditating in the temple at Tiruvittiyar there arose in his mind a desire to see Ramana Maharshi. No sooner did the desire arise in him than he saw the saint before him physically. He felt the touch of the saint and was overwhelmed with bliss. Another devotee Raghavachariar was sitting in front of Ramana Maharshi along with other devotees. All of a sudden it looked as though Ramana Maharshi along with the picture of Dakshinamurthy which was hanging on the wall had alike vanished although after some time every thing was as before.

There was an admirer of Ramana Maharshi who had practised austerity at different places and who had finally settled at Tiruvannamalai in order to be near the Marahashi. But he was also eager that his favourite companion should share his enthusiasm. One day he told his friends that he who does not believe in Maharshi would be commiting the sin of Brahmahatya. Maharshi replied by way of consoling the friend that Brahmahatya merely means the failure to realize Brahman which lies dormant within us. Assured of this explanation the friend attained peace of mind. Again there was a distinguished police officer of the name of F. H. Humfriz who was living at Vellore which is a few miles away from Tiruvannamalai. When the said police was learning Telegu from his tutor Narasingiah, he told his teacher that he had seen the teacher's guru in a dream and that he was able to identify his portrait out of many others. He was also able to draw an exact picture of the Ashram at Tiruvannamalai although he had never been there before. He said that the body of the saint is like a temple for it emanates the light of God. When on personal contact Mr. Humfrits asked the saint if it was possible for one to serve the world, the saint replied that it was possible if one realised the unity between one self and the world.

Mean while other events were happening at Madura. The family property was sold and Alagammal, the mother of the saint came to live at the Ashram. Although the Maharshi renounced the world he continued to have great regard for his mother and served her in every possible way. He regarded her as the embodiment of the Universal Mother. She too tried to adjust herself to the changed circumstances though at times affection had the better of her. Thus one day when she was sitting near the Maharshi, it looked as though Maharshi had vanished and his place was taken by a Sivalinga. She was panic striken though shortly after every thing was usual as before. On another occasion, instead of the familiar figure of her son she saw a divine radiance and a pair of venomous snakes coiled round the neck. When in the fulness of time the last days of the mother approached the saint served her with care and affection. The Vedas were being chanted and Ram-nam was also chanted. When the mother passed away the saint was completely unperturhed ; he said she then became one with the eternal pure Consciousness, and that there was no Asoucha and that all might partake of the food that had been cooked.

Thus it was that the saint taught the great message of renunciation. Renunciation according to him is the giving up of the desire for enjoyment physical and mental, here and hereafter. In this way one comes to be at one with the universe. It is not incumbent that one should wear a particular kind of dress or give up home and all. One can live in the spirit of renunciation. The aspirant who works not for the fruit of action realises the eternity of the soul. He is like an unattached actor in the stage knowing the part that he has to play in the world.

As the years passed the Ashram attracted many visitors from all over India as well as from abroad. Some of them have recorded their impressions. Paul Brunton's book 'A search in secret India' and Osbourn's book on the Maharshi are worth mentioning. The volumes entitled 'Day to day with Bhagavan' give the questions which the disciples put to him and the answers given by the Maharshi to those who sought him. Some of those sayings are worth quoting. One day a disciple asked him if it will be sufficient if he should practise ethical ideals such as Satya, Ahimsa, Brahmacharya and Aparigraha. The saint replied that there is no end to the number of such attributes and that they should all end in the One. On another occasion another disciple asked him about the life after death. The saint replied that it is futile question as long as one does not know the real nature of the soul. According to him discrmination is the key to knowledge in as much as it removes all our angularities and the knowledge of the soul includes the knowledge of the universe also because both of them are identical. That is why the small book 'Who am I' is the key to all his teachings. His final teaching is summed up in a Tamil poem of forty stanzas which is now available in translation in many languages. One may hold that his teaching is in conformity with Siddhanta of Sankara while excluding the polemic part of it.

The visitor to the Ashram will find that the very atmosphere is surcharged with spirituality and that it brings to him the peace that passeth understanding. Day to day life in the Ashram is the finest commentary on the Gita ideal of Samadarsana ; for the love of the saint included in its comprehensive grasp the dumb animals also such as the Ashram cow and the monkeys in the Ashram trees.

In the last days of his life the saint suffered from a poisonous tumour which was diagnosed as cancer. Medicine failed to work and the pain was intense yet the saint bore it all. He used to compare the body to a plantain leaf on which various dishes are served when the feast is over the leaf is thrown away without any compunction. Even so with the body which is merely an instrument which calls us to the feast of life. He said 'It is useless to mourn for the body. All say 'I am going to die'. Really speaking I am not going anywhere, where shall I go. I shall be there where I am always.' Before the day of his passing away when the doctor wished to apply some medicine he said every thing would be all right in two day's time. It was the fourteenth of April 1950. The devotees were sitting around the saint singing the glory of Arunachala Siva. He said to them all 'Santosam' signifying 'thanks'. After a quarter to nine at night there was one lone devotee left, the saint whispered to him to help him to sit in Padmasana and then uttering the word 'AUM' he passed away exactly in the manner described in the Gita. And then a strange phenomenon happened. A French photographer wished to take the last photograph of the saint and all that he saw was a flash of light shooting like bright star and circling the sky before it vanished. Thus it was that the saint gave his last darsan to his numerous devotees who were scatternd far and wide.

THE END

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